

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



please ask for Leslie Manning

direct line 0300 300 5132

date 10 July 2014

NOTICE OF MEETING

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Date & Time

Monday, 21 July 2014 at 2.30 p.m.

Venue at

Council Chamber, Priory House, Chicksands, Shefford

Richard Carr
Chief Executive

PLEASE NOTE THE NEW START TIME AND VENUE

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 2 June 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.	Quarter One Report on the Fostering Service To consider a report outlining the activity in the Fostering Service during Quarter One.	* 21 - 26
6.	Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2013-14 To consider a report outlining the activity of the Independent Reviewing Officers/Conference and Review Service in relation to the reviews of Looked After Children during 2013-14.	* 27 - 44
7.	Audit Outcomes of Pathway Plans for Looked After Children & Care Leavers To consider a report which provides an update on the measures taken to improve the quality of Pathway Plans for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.	+ To Follow

8. **Access to Suitable Accommodation for Care Leavers**

* 45 - 52

To consider a report that updates the Panel in respect of accommodation provision for care leavers.

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Monday, 2 June 2014

PRESENT

Elected Members (voting)

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

Officers (voting)

Mrs J Ogle – Director of Social Care and Housing

Carers (non-voting)

Mrs C Andrews
Mrs N Banks
Mrs H Philips MBE

Officers in Attendance:	Mr A Ahmed	– Team Manager 13+ Transition and Leaving Care
	Mr M Ciuro	– Deputy Team Manager
	Ms A Craig	– Panel Professional Advisor
	Mr G Jones	– Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
	Mr L Manning	– Committee Services Officer
	Mrs C Seamarks	– Personal Advisor / Participation Support Worker
	Ms M Short	– Participation Officer
	Ms J Singh	– Adoption Team Manager
	Mr E Wong	– Head of Corporate Parenting

Others in Attendance: Former Looked After Child

CPP/14/1 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 24 March 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CPP/14/2 **Members' Interests**

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

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

CPP/14/3 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman announced that he and the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations would leave the meeting at approximately 12.30 p.m. to attend the official opening of the Academy of Social Work and Early Intervention at 1.00 p.m.

The Chairman then stated that the young man referred to in agenda item 11 was expected to arrive earlier than originally intended. Rather than delay the young man unnecessarily, and in order to allow him to return to work as quickly as possible, item 11 would be brought forward for consideration at the most suitable point in the meeting.

CPP/14/4 **Involving Young People in the Corporate Parenting Panel**

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations reported verbally on ways of engaging with the young people from the Children in Care Council (CiCC) who attended the Panel's meetings. In connection with this matter the Assistant Director circulated a document entitled 'Group Discussions with the CiCC' which set out the CiCC's advice for those taking part in group discussions with young people.

A copy of the document is attached at Appendix A to these minutes.

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations stressed the sensitivity of the issues raised at Panel meetings and requested that the young people's wish for personal privacy be respected. A Member suggested that short profiles setting out the age, time in care and so forth of the young people attending the Panel's meetings be provided to assist Members. In response the Participation Officer undertook to raise this suggestion with the CiCC. The Assistant Director added that the content of the profiles should be left to the discretion of the individuals and suggested that it would, in turn, be helpful to the CiCC if Members provided their own profiles.

NOTED

the verbal report of the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the advice for group discussion drawn up by the Children in Care Council (CiCC), and contained in the document entitled 'Group Discussions with the CiCC', be approved and adopted;
- 2 that the CiCC consider the suggested creation of short profiles for those CiCC members attending the Corporate Parenting Panel's meetings, the content for each profile being subject to the wishes of the individual concerned;
- 3 that the members of the Corporate Parenting Panel consider creating their own profiles for use by the CiCC.

CPP/14/5 Quarter Four Report on the Fostering Service

The Panel received a report by the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services which outlined activity in the Fostering Service during Quarter Four (January to March 2014). Members noted that it had not proved possible to provide the usual comparison to previous quarters because the joint service arrangement with Bedford Borough Council had ended on 31 December 2013 and the data previously reported to the Panel was based on a shared service.

The report contained updates on the following areas:

- Background
- Recruitment of Foster Carers
- Training for Foster Carers
- Ending of the Shared Service Arrangement
- Plans for the Next Financial Year

The Panel Professional Advisor introduced the report drawing Members' attention in particular to the growth in recruitment enquiries following the rebranding exercise and recruitment strategy, and the provision of training for foster carers.

In response to a Member's query regarding the introduction of a fees scheme for foster carers the Panel Professional Advisor explained that the scheme involved a payment to foster carers which was, in effect, a financial reward to the carer, and not intended to contribute towards the cost of caring for a child. It was envisaged that the payment of the fee would help the service become more competitive with both neighbouring authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) and enable people who couldn't, at present, afford to foster to consider doing so. The meeting noted that initial feedback indicated that the scheme was proving successful and had contributed towards the significant increase in enquiries over the last few months. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations added that the scheme was similar to those already in place in neighbouring local authorities.

The Member then sought clarification regarding the Fostering Service's relocation to Stephenson Court following the disaggregation process. In response the Head of Corporate Parenting explained that Stephenson Court lay within Bedford Borough Council's boundaries but the lease for the property was longstanding and it remained in Central Bedfordshire's interest to continue to use it. Comment was passed that the property was located close to the boundary with Central Bedfordshire and that many of that Council's foster carers actually lived in Bedford. Nonetheless the Member reminded the meeting of the principle that all Central Bedfordshire Council staff should be based within Central Bedfordshire.

Discussion then took place on whether the new methods of working introduced under the MySpace project had resulted in a negative impact on the operational efficiency of some Fostering Service staff. In response the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations acknowledged that the new ways of working could be challenging for staff but he stressed that the service was being monitored during this time of transition. The Assistant Director then offered to update the Panel on how staff were adapting to the new working methods and this was welcomed by Members.

With regard to the provision of training the Vice-Chairman referred to the apparent difficulties experienced by some foster carers to complete their training, support and development (TSD) standards. In response the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations explained the various reasons why some foster carers found it difficult to complete their TSD standards and set out the alternative learning methods available to them. He also referred to the additional support that was being put in place to help the foster carers.

NOTED

the content of the Quarter Four report on the Fostering Service for the period January to March 2014.

RESOLVED

that the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations update the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel on how staff in the Fostering Service were adapting to the new ways of working introduced under the MySpace project.

CPP/14/6

Annual Reports for the Adoption Service and Fostering Service

The Panel received a report by the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services which outlined the statutory framework for the submission of annual reports on the Adoption and Fostering Services and summarised the key points contained in the Adoption Agency and Fostering Agency Annual Reports for 2013-14. Copies of the Annual Reports were attached as appendices to the report.

The meeting noted that the Annual Reports contained information for both Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council for the period up to the end of December 2013 because the Adoption and Fostering Service had been a shared service until that date. Following disaggregation, however, the Reports focused solely on Central Bedfordshire Council.

Following an introduction by the Head of Corporate Parenting and the Adoption Team Manager Members sought clarification on various matters within the Annual Reports. A Member also commented on the absence of a report by the Adoption Panel Chair in the Adoption Agency Annual Report. She pointed out that, in contrast, a report by the Fostering Panel Chair was included as an appendix to the Fostering Agency Annual Report. In response the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations undertook to investigate this matter.

Following discussion Members indicated that, if possible, they would wish to be advised of the outcomes of adoption placements and queried if this was feasible. In response the Adoption Team Manager explained that it was not as once a child had been adopted the Council had no right of contact. She added that the legal relationship between an adopted child and its new parents was the same as that for any other family.

Further discussion then took place as Members sought additional information and clarification with regard issues contained in the Adoption Agency Annual Report.

(Note: At this point in the meeting further discussion on the report was adjourned to enable the exclusion of the press and public at agenda item 10 and consideration of agenda item 11).

CPP/14/7 **Exclusion of Press and Public**

RESOLVED

that in accordance with Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that consideration of the item is likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

CPP/14/8 **Celebrating the Journey of the Child**

The Panel welcomed a young man who had attended the meeting to tell Members of his 'journey' from Looked After Child to young adult. The Panel was first shown a video, following which the young man read out a statement which added additional information to his story. Arising from this Members asked the young man a number of questions. They also congratulated him on the progress which he had made, often against extremely difficult circumstances.

At the conclusion the Chairman, on behalf of the Panel, thanked the young man for his attendance and for sharing the story of his life with Members.

After the young man had left the meeting Members were advised of the training he was undertaking. Discussion then took place on related issues, including support arrangements and opportunities for life skills development for young people in similar circumstances. A foster carer representative cautioned the meeting from over emphasising educational attainment and reminded Members that many young people found practical training to be more appealing.

(Note: At this point in the meeting the Chairman and the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations gave their apologies and left the meeting to attend the official opening of the Academy of Social Work and Early Intervention).

Councillor A L Dodwell in the Chair

Further discussion took place during which Members congratulated the officers for their efforts in assisting the young man. Members also indicated that they would wish to be updated on the latter's progress.

The meeting noted the underlying challenges which some young people faced.

NOTED

the video and statement presented to the meeting.

(Note: at the conclusion of the above item the Panel moved back into public session to consider its remaining business).

CPP/14/9

Annual Reports for the Adoption Service and Fostering Service (Conclusion)

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations introduced the Fostering Agency Annual Report. He advised that some of the business covered had already been considered by Members under the Quarter Four Report on the Fostering Service (minute CPP/14/5 refers). The Assistant Director worked through the report drawing Members' attention to various matters. With regard to the support offered to carers he referred to the changes that had taken place in the supervision of social workers to ensure a return to continuity in this area over the coming months.

In response to a query on the foster carer recruitment enquiries for April and May the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations stated that the April figure was the same as the previous year when a joint service with Bedford Borough Council existed and that the figure for May exceeded last year's joint service figure. He acknowledged the challenge in converting recruitment enquiries into placements. However, he also commented that if every enquiry received subsequently required a formal assessment it would place considerable pressure on the service and assistance would be required to

process the assessments. However, the drop out rate was substantial once many enquirers were fully aware of the demands they would face.

In response to a foster carer's query the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations acknowledged that some existing carers did not currently have placements. He explained that this was because of the mismatch between the areas of demand such as siblings, children with challenging behaviour and older children and the children that some carers were willing to foster. He added that carers were encouraged to consider taking in children which they had not originally felt able to. In response to a further query the Assistant Director stated that available suitable placements in other local authorities were used and, in turn, Central Bedfordshire reciprocated if it had available placements required by other authorities. In response to comments made by a foster carer regarding the difficulties she was experiencing when caring for a child from a neighbouring local authority the Vice-Chairman suggested that she raise the matter with the Assistant Director at the conclusion of the meeting.

NOTED

the annual reports for the Adoption Service and Fostering Service.

CPP/14/10 **Placement Stability & Suitability**

Members received a slide pack, circulated at the meeting, which outlined performance data relating to placement stability and suitability up to 31 March 2014. It included the stability of placements for Looked After Children, a summary of the performance data and plans to improve placement stability and suitability. Members' attention was drawn in particular the data revealing that approximately 30% of Looked After Children experienced two or more placement moves

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

Although noting that a Task and Finish Group had been set up to consider the improvement of placement stability, including the use of CAMHs, a Member expressed concern with regard to the time taken by the referral process. In response, however, she was assured that timescales had been set and performance was tracked and reviewed.

Following a further query by a Member as to whether any theme was apparent from the data which had been collected the Deputy Team Manager advised that additional work would be required to interpret the data for this purpose. However, he stated that work was being undertaken to establish which Looked After Children were most at risk of an unstable placement and this should be available within six months. The placements would then be monitored so that remedial action could be taken if required.

NOTED

the slide pack outlining performance data relating to placement stability and suitability as circulated at the meeting.

CPP/14/11 Housing Issues

The Director of Social Care, Health and Housing provided the Panel with a brief verbal update on developments related to housing matters. She referred to the Executive's adoption of Allocations Policy quotas for special groups which would enable the Council to plan for the needs of people as they moved through the care system and offer the appropriate support package to them. She stated that there would be a full report submitted to the next meeting of the Panel updating Members on housing issues.

NOTED

the verbal update on housing matters.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.30 a.m. and concluded at 12.55 p.m.)

APPENDIX A



Group Discussions with The CiCC



The Children in Care Council meet on a regular basis with various professionals; they have created their top tips for taking part in group discussions.

We want to give you a good idea of our experiences, invest your time in us as individuals and as a group.

Do not ask us personal questions in a group forum, when we know you we maybe happy to share our own personal experiences.

Talk to us, build a rapport.

We are not just cases; we are real young people with names & feelings.

Listen and respect our wishes & feelings.

We are all different & have different experiences and views; we may find it hard to relate to other people and their experiences.

We are all at different stages of our care journey and some of us will be more comfortable to talk about things, we will share what we feel able to.

Try not to ask us questions about the reasons we are in care or about our birth families, these are areas we find difficult to talk about.

Please keep our information / identities confidential, not everyone knows we are in care.

Be prepared for our answers, some questions may bring out our emotions.

Please don't be offended if we say we do not want to answer a question, just move onto the next one.

We will give you our opinions of your service, our answers may not always be positive.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, we look forward to working with you.
The CiCC

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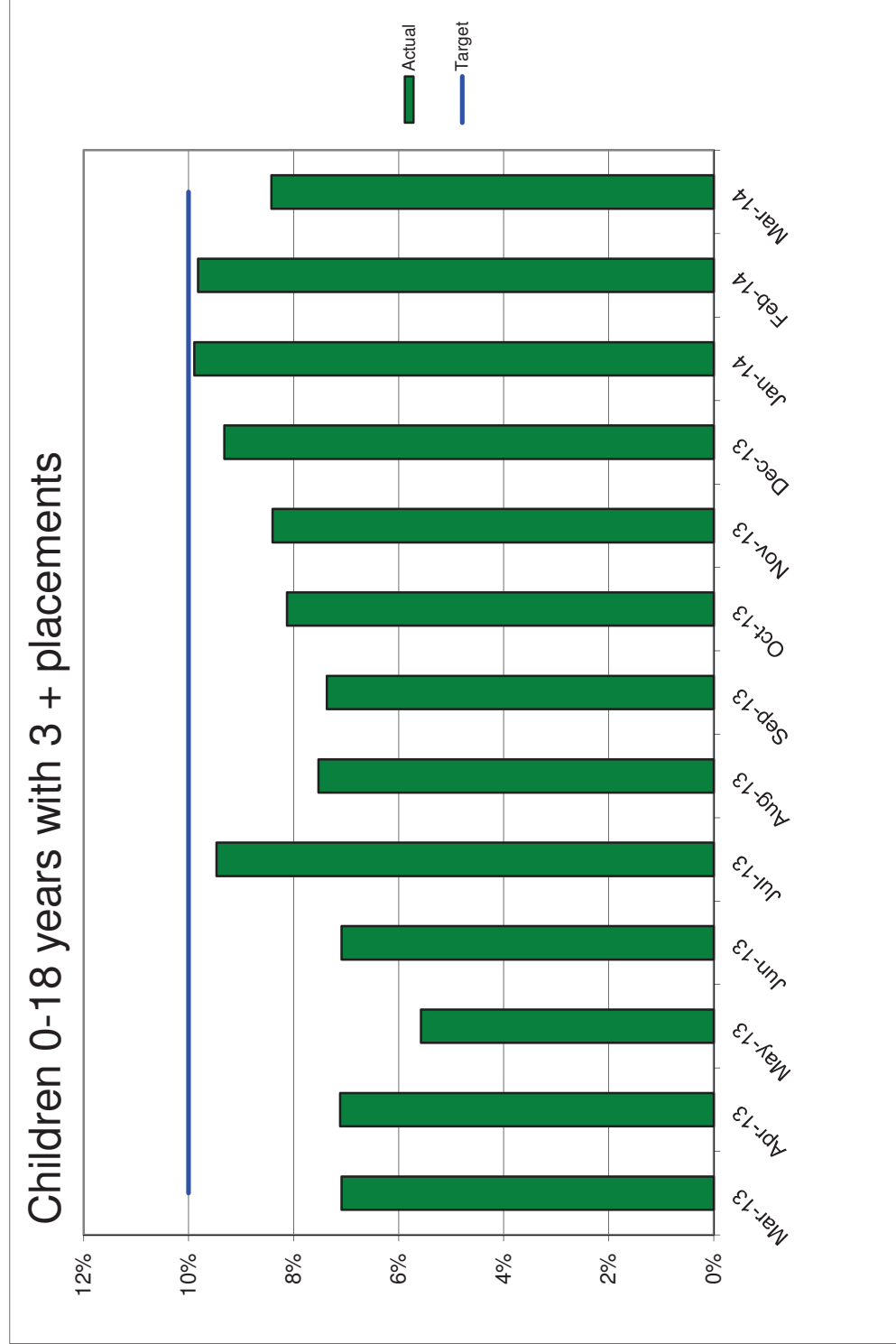
Appendix B

Placement Stability & Suitability

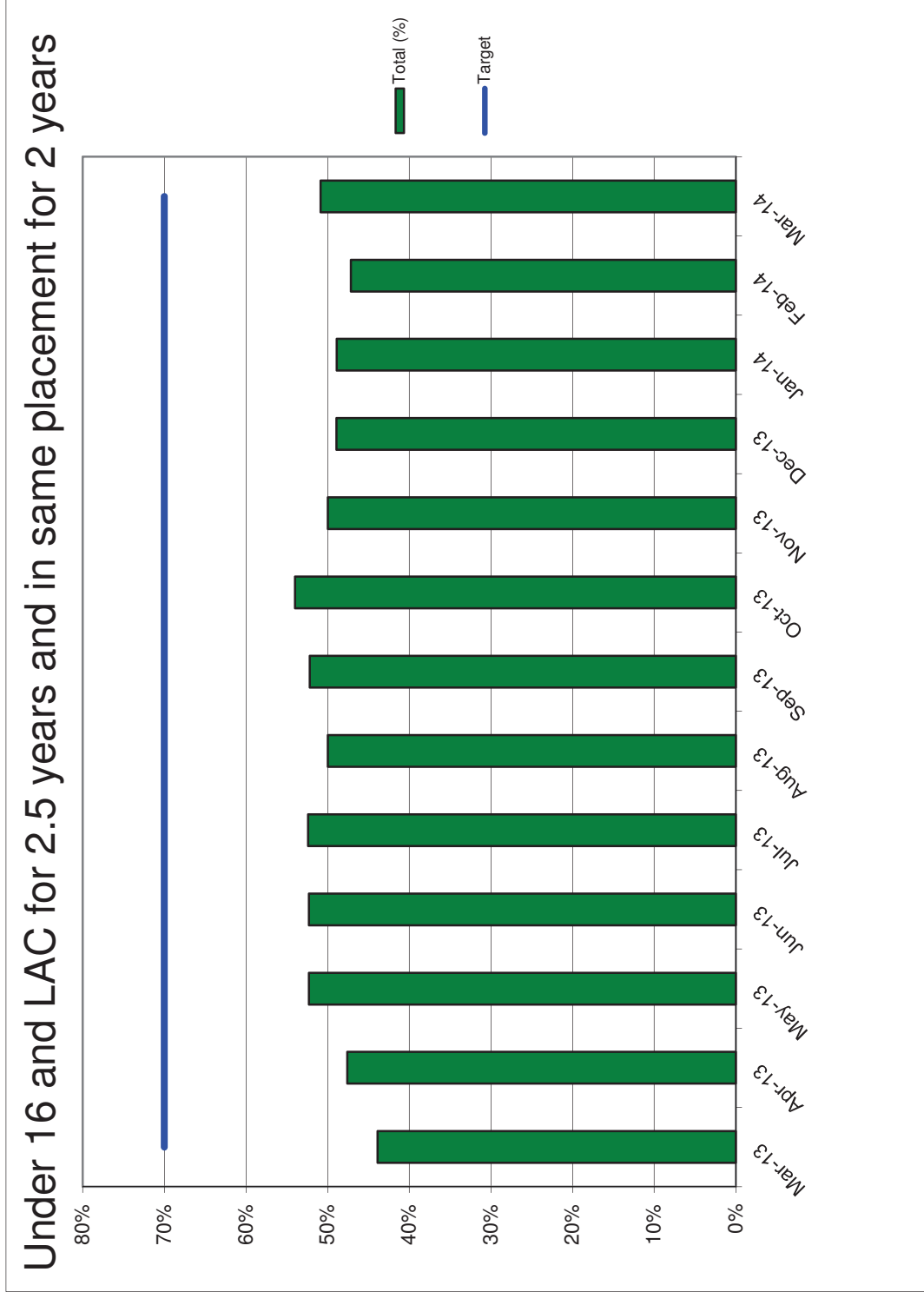
- Performance Data
- Plans to Improve Placement Stability & Suitability

Performance Data – rolling 12 months to 31st March 2014

Stability of placements of Children Looked After



Long term stability of placements of Looked After Children



Summary of Performance Data – 31st March 2014

- LAC 0-18 years with 3+ placements over a 12 month period.

Target = 10%

Performance = 8.4%

(23 out of 273 LAC)

- LAC for at least 2.5yrs and in the same placement for 2yrs

Target = 70%

Performance = 50.9%

(29 out of 57 LAC)

- Approximately 30 % of LAC with 2+ placement moves

Plans to Improve Placement Stability & Suitability

Task and Finish Group

1. Early Identification 2+ Placement Moves
2. Complex Case Discussion and Monthly Placement Stability Panel
3. Review of Matching Processes Workshops
4. FISS
5. Disruption and Placement Stability Meetings
6. Use of CAMH's
7. Sufficiency
8. Training for Social Workers and Foster Carers

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Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 21 July 2014
Subject: Quarter One Report on the Fostering Service
Report of: Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Children's Services
Summary: The report outlines the activities in the Fostering Service during the first three months of the new financial year 2014 - 2015.

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 new financial year 2014/2015 the Adoption and Fostering within Children's Services has a combined annual budget of £8,044,710.

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. Currently there are 14.3 FTE social workers within the service, 1.5 FTE social work assistants, 1 FTE Marketing Officer and 1 FTE Training Officer supporting the service in relation to recruitment/training and placements. 2 FTE administrators also support the 2 fostering teams.
5. The Fostering Service comes under the umbrella of the Corporate Parenting Service. The staffing structure of the Fostering Service is still under review with some adjustments are expected by September 2014.

Equalities/Human Rights:

6. Fostering Service provided to Looked After Children affects all sectors of communities.

Community Safety:

7. Not applicable

Sustainability:

8. Not applicable

Procurement:

9. Not applicable

RECOMMENDATION:

- **That the Corporate Parenting Panel note the content of the report.**

Background

10. The Children Act 2004, Care Standards Act 2000 and associated relevant Regulations and National Minimum standards require Local Authority Fostering Service to report to Members at three monthly intervals. This will be achieved by presentation of quarterly update to the Corporate Parenting Panel and a full year Annual Report to this Panel and the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee each year.
11. This is the first report for the financial year 2014/2015.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

12. During April, May and June 2014 a number of recruitment activities/events took place, in line with the fostering service recruitment strategy. These included attendance at Flitwick indoor market, Flitwick Carnival, Houghton Regis 'Pride' event, stalls at Asda in Dunstable and Waitrose in Ampthill, Leighton and

Linslade May Fayre, Armed Forces Day, attendance at a Joint Fostering and Adoption event with Luton Borough Council and other events in Shefford and Flitwick.

13. On going promotion of the Fostering Service took place on Facebook from 14 April to 09 May and on 14 May 2014 the Fostering Service's own Facebook page went live. Posts on the website informed viewers of the forthcoming outreach work taking place. Tweets occurred during the Lorraine Pascale documentary about being fostered in June 2014. There was also an article written for News Central which contained an interview with Central Bedfordshire Council foster carers about what it is like to foster.
14. The drive to recruit more foster carers was also highlighted in the Director of Children's Services regular newsletter.
15. As a result of the recruitment drive during this period we had a total of 86 enquiries about fostering. There were 20 in April (compared to 14 for the same period last year when the service was a joint one), 45 in May (compared to 15 for the same period last year) and 21 in June (compared to 15 for the same period last year). There were 35 Initial Visits allocated during this period, 14 for April, 16 for May and 5 for June. There were 5 application forms received; 2 for April and 3 in May.

Assessments

16. As of the 30 June 2014 there were 23 assessments under way. 10 were for general fostering, 2 were for family link, 2 were emergency regulation 24 assessments (family and friends), 5 were full family and friends' assessments, 2 were Special Guardianship Order assessments and 2 were private fostering assessments.
17. During this quarter 5 families were approved to foster, 4 were to provide family and friends care and 1 was to provide short term/respice care. Two sets of family/friends carers (connected persons) were approved at Fostering Panel during this period. As of the 30 June 2014 the service had 92 fostering households (63 mainstream and 29 family and friends) and there were 6 private fostering arrangements.

Referrals/placements

18. During April, May and June 2014, 13 new fostering placements were made, 10 of these children were placed with in house foster carers, 2 went to I.F.A.'s and 1 was placed with a family member as an emergency under regulation 24. 14 placements ended during this period, 7 because a Special Guardianship or Residence Orders were granted, 5 returned home to birth family and 2 moved into adoptive homes.
19. At of 30 June 2014 there were a total of 86 children living with in-house foster carer, 6 children were placed with Bedford Borough foster carers and 108 children were in Independent Fostering Provision (IFA).

Training

20. During April, May and June 2014, 13 training courses took place. Courses covered topics such as childcare emergency first aid, allegations, bereavement, life story work, managing and supporting transitions and endings, safer caring, evidencing fostering standards and delegated authority.
21. There were 62 households who had completed their mandatory Training, Support and Development Standards. 12 households were overdue in completing these standards. Social Workers and the training officer have been putting in additional support to help these carers achieve these standards.

Ofsted notifications

22. Whenever a significant event happens, i.e. a child goes missing from placement or a serious incident/accident occurs, the agency has to report these to Ofsted. During this period there were 4 Ofsted notifications, 3 for young persons going missing, (2 were for the same young person going missing) and 1 was due to a child protection concern (s47 investigation, the outcome of this allegation was substantiated). The case where there was a child protection concern was due to issues of emotional and physical abuse. The Police did not prosecute the alleged perpetrators due to a lack of evidence; these Carers were de-registered on 02 July 2014. The children were removed to Independent Fostering Agency carers in the area.

Allegations

23. There were 3 allegations made against 3 households during April, May and June 2014. 2 were due to emotional and physical abuse allegations and 1 was due to hygiene and the presentation of issues of the child. The outcome in the first 2 cases was that the children were moved to alternative placements as there was evidence to support some of the allegations. The outcome in the case with hygiene issues was that the carer was advised to manage the care of the child more closely and this child remained with the carer.

Complaints

24. There were 3 complaints made about the service during this period. 1 was in relation to the panel process/conflict of interest due to staff personal knowledge of the person attending panel; this complaint outcome was upheld. 1 was a complaint from a person who was not approved as a Regulation 24 carer and who disagreed with the assessment of them and information included in the report. 1 was from a carer who felt her initial complaint had not been taken seriously or dealt with quickly enough. This complaint was partly upheld in relation to some delays taking place but not upheld in relation to the complaint not being taken seriously.

Next Steps

25. The service will continue to focus on recruiting more foster carers as this is our key priority.
26. The other main areas of focus for the teams over the coming months will be the Frameworki and business processes, raising practice standards, partnership and collaborations.

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

None

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Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 21 July 2014
Subject: Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2013-14
Report of: Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive / Director Children's Services Operations
Summary: The report outlines the activity of the Independent Reviewing Officers/ Conference and Review Service in relation to the reviews of Looked After Children during 2013/14.

Advising Officer: Isabel Wilks, Team Manager Conference and Review
Contact Officer: Gerard Jones, Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

Medium Term Plan for Central Bedfordshire – the key priorities which relate to the report are:

- Promoting health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable
- Improved educational attainment

The Children and Young People's Plan 2011/2014

- Priority 1: Helping children and young people achieve more
- Priority 2: Protecting children and keeping them safe

Provision of an independent reviewing service to scrutinise care planning for Looked After Children is a statutory responsibility of the Council. Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) are employed to review care planning arrangements for individual children in order to secure the best outcomes for those children.

Financial:

1. The Conference and Review Service is part of the wider Quality Assurance Service within Children's Services Operations. The service is responsible for the coordination and chairing of reviews for Looked After Children and Child Protection Conferences. The Quality Assurance Service has an annual budget of £906,000.

2. The financial implications noted in this report relate to the need to keep under review the staffing complement in order to ensure compliance with the recommended caseloads specified in the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Handbook.

Legal:

3. Regulation and statutory guidance detail the requirement to report on the activity of the Independent Reviewing Service in relation to the reviews of Looked After Children.

Risk Management:

4. Breach of Regulatory and statutory guidance by non provision of a service by which the care plans of Looked After Children are reviewed and reputational risks by virtue of non production of an Annual Report in line with statutory guidance.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

5. Not Applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

6. Adherence to Human Rights and Equality issues are maintained.

Community Safety:

7. Not Applicable.

Sustainability:

8. Not Applicable.

Procurement:

9. Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Corporate Parenting Panel notes the content of the report.

Background

10. The IRO Handbook – Statutory Guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review of Looked After Children states that the IRO Manager should be responsible for the production of an Annual Report for the scrutiny of members of the Corporate Parenting Panel.
11. This report provides an opportunity to report on the activity of Children's Services in relation to Looked After Children, highlight areas of good practice and identify areas which require improvement. In addition the report describes

the range of work the service has engaged in during the year and areas for development, which will be prioritised in the coming year.

Qualitative Information about the Service

12. The report sets out data in relation to the Looked After Children population in Central Bedfordshire.
13. There were 777 reviews held in respect of 343 children during the year from April 2013 to March 2014. The number of reviews held in respect of any individual child or young person is determined by when they become looked after, in accordance with statutory timescales and changes of circumstances which might require an additional review to be held.

Qualitative Information about the IRO service

16. The report sets out data in relation to the timeliness of reviews and participation of children and young people in their reviews. 98.9% of reviews were held on time during 2013/14 and of the cohort of children for whom participation in the review process is measured, 98% participated in some degree at their review.

Conduct of the Service

17. The Service has focussed on the quality of care planning and provided challenge and scrutiny to operational practitioners and managers when gaps in relation to timely and appropriate plans for children have been identified. In addition the service has responded to new requirements as a result of the Family Justice reforms.

Conclusions and Next Steps

18. The Conference and Review Service will continue to focus on delivering good outcomes for Central Bedfordshire's Looked After children and young people in accordance with the priorities of the Council and our aspirations for our Looked After Children. The work will continue to be rooted in the wider Quality Assurance Framework for Children's Services and the continuous development of good practice and high professional standards across the service in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for those children for whom the Council are the corporate parent.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2013/14

Background Papers:

None

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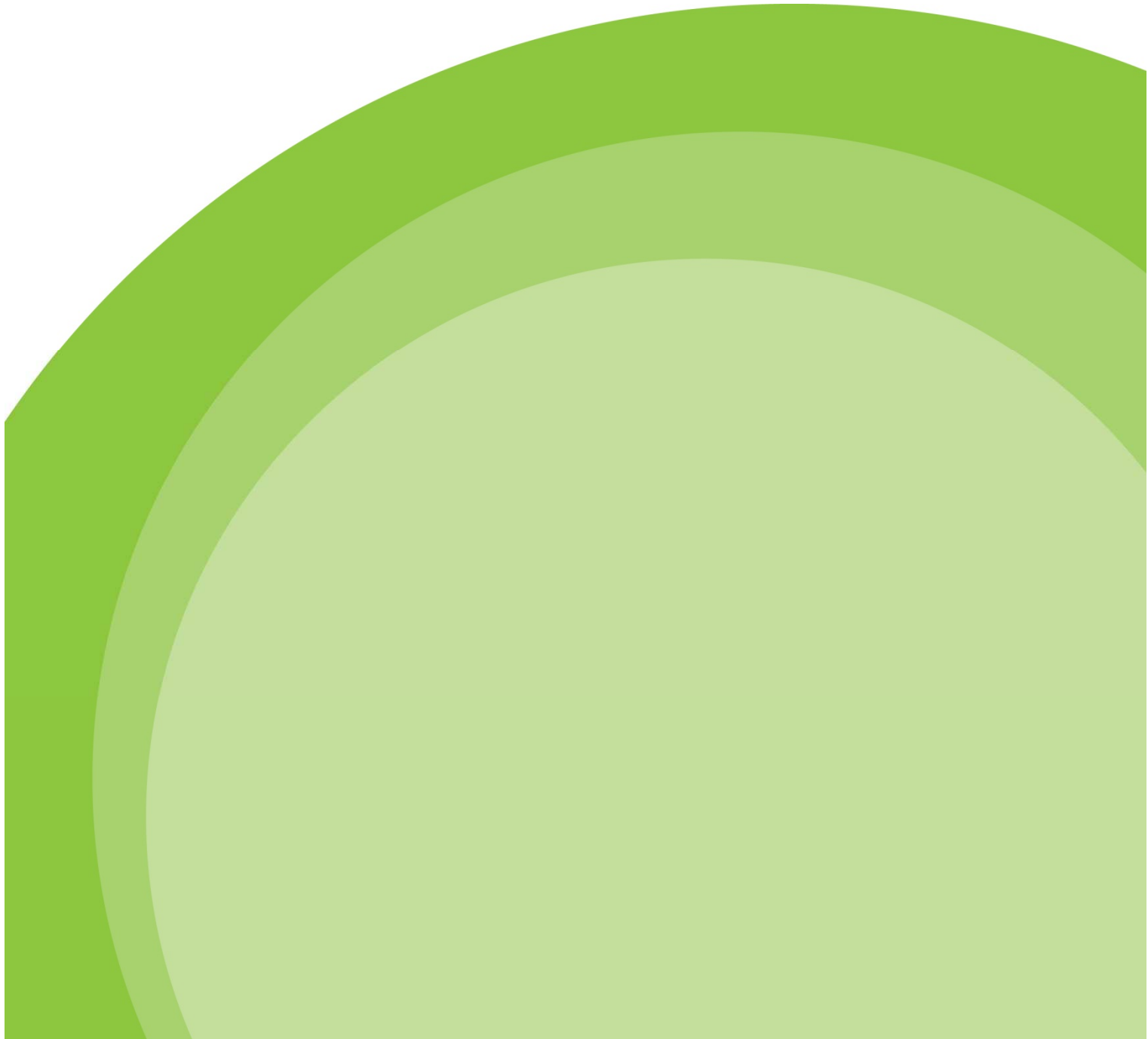
Central Bedfordshire Council
www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Quality Assurance
Children Services Operations



Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report April 2013 – March 2014

The contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers to Quality
Assuring and Improving Services for Children in Care



Appendix A

1.0 Purpose of service and legal context

1.1 The Independent Review Officers' (IRO) Service is set within the framework of the IRO Handbook, linked to the Care Planning Regulations and Guidance, which were introduced in April 2011. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement of care planning for children in care and for challenging drift and delay. The responsibility of the IRO has changed from the management of the review process to a wider overview of the case including regular monitoring and follow-up between reviews.

1.2 The recently published National Children's Bureau research entitled 'The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in England' (March 2014) provides an evidence base about the way the role actually operates in order to inform future policy and practice.

The foreword written by Mr Justice Peter Jackson makes the following comment:

'The independent Reviewing Officer must be the visible embodiment of our commitment to meet our legal obligations to this special group of children. The health and effectiveness of the IRO Service is a direct reflection of whether we are meeting that commitment or whether we are failing.'

This Annual IRO Report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO service in Central Bedfordshire as required by statutory guidance.

2.0 Professional Profile of the IRO Service

2.1 In Central Bedfordshire the Independent Reviewing Officers' (IRO) function is undertaken by Review Managers in the Conference and Review (CRS) within the Quality Assurance Service. Review Managers undertake two main areas of work: chairing of Child Protection Conferences and Looked after Children's Reviews. In addition a small number of short break reviews when provided under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 are chaired by an IRO. One worker undertakes the Local Authority Designated Officer role, in combination primarily with chairing CP conferences, but does review six looked after children for whom she has remained the IRO to provide continuity.

2.2 In April 2013 the service had an establishment of 6.8 FTE (Full Time Equivalent) posts. This equated to 8 Review Managers of whom three were full time, 5 part-time. Three workers were agency staff covering sickness and maternity and at that point a vacant growth post. The staffing position over the year has been challenging with changes in permanent staff being covered by further use of agency workers. However having successfully recruited three new permanent staff members in Autumn 2013, two of whom are in post, one starting in May 2014, the situation is much improved. The rise in the number of children on child protection plans and looked after children led the establishment to be increased to 7.8 posts. With the new worker joining the service will comprise nine Review Managers, six permanent and three long-serving agency workers.

2.3 In terms of diversity the team has a good gender balance reflecting the looked after children population. Workers come from a range of backgrounds but do not fully reflect the ethnic mix of the population. Ideally the workforce would reflect the diversity of the Looked After Children population it is serving, but within a small group a wide representation has not been achievable. Within the social work teams there is a wider range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds represented.

2.4 All Review Managers have as required a considerable number of years' experience. Within the group there is a wide range of experience, with IROs previous roles including front line social work with Children with Disabilities, Looked after Children and Child

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Protection, supervisory and managerial experience, residential experience and previous work as Children's Guardians. Several of the team live locally, others in neighbouring authorities. There is a good knowledge of the local area within the team.

2.5 All of the Review Managers undertake additional roles and duties, either as representatives of the IRO service or as part of their wider role. These include:

- Monthly Quality Assurance Liaison meetings with social work teams as part of the QA strategy
- Attendance at Multi Agency Public Protection meetings as the Children's Services representative
- Supervision of the Parent Partnership Service which sits within CRS as an off-line management role
- Regular liaison with National Youth Advocacy Service including review of the service level agreement for provision of Advocacy and Independent visiting
- Contribution to LSCB training
- Participation in rolling monthly audit programme
- Attendance at Frameworki practitioner group
- Attendance at quarterly liaison meetings with Cafcass

3.0 Arrangement for Reviews

3.1 The social worker and IRO share responsibility for the review.

3.2 The IRO Handbook sets the expectation that children and young people are included in an age appropriate way in deciding on the arrangement for the review – their review.

3.3 Deciding who needs to attend, where the review should be held, arranging invitations and consultations, providing reports, recording the discussion and ensuring timely distribution of the review record, involve co-ordination between social worker, IRO and administrative staff. Business processes are set within the work-flow and formatting of the Frameworki, the children's case management and recording system.

3.4 This combination of factors provides considerable challenge to providing a child-friendly child centred process. The changes to the recording system for Looked After Children reviews in October 2013 initially resulted in reduced effectiveness. Staff found the Frameworki process complicated and the interdependence of the work flow caused some frustrations and delay.

3.5 The IRO and Looked After Children services have worked together to streamline the process and ensure IROs and Social Workers each take responsibility for their part of the process.

3.6 The IRO service is responsible for sending out consultation leaflets in advance of the review. The social workers are responsible for the invitation of the appropriate professionals. It is expected that this will be agreed in discussion between the social worker and IRO and that the child's views be sought.

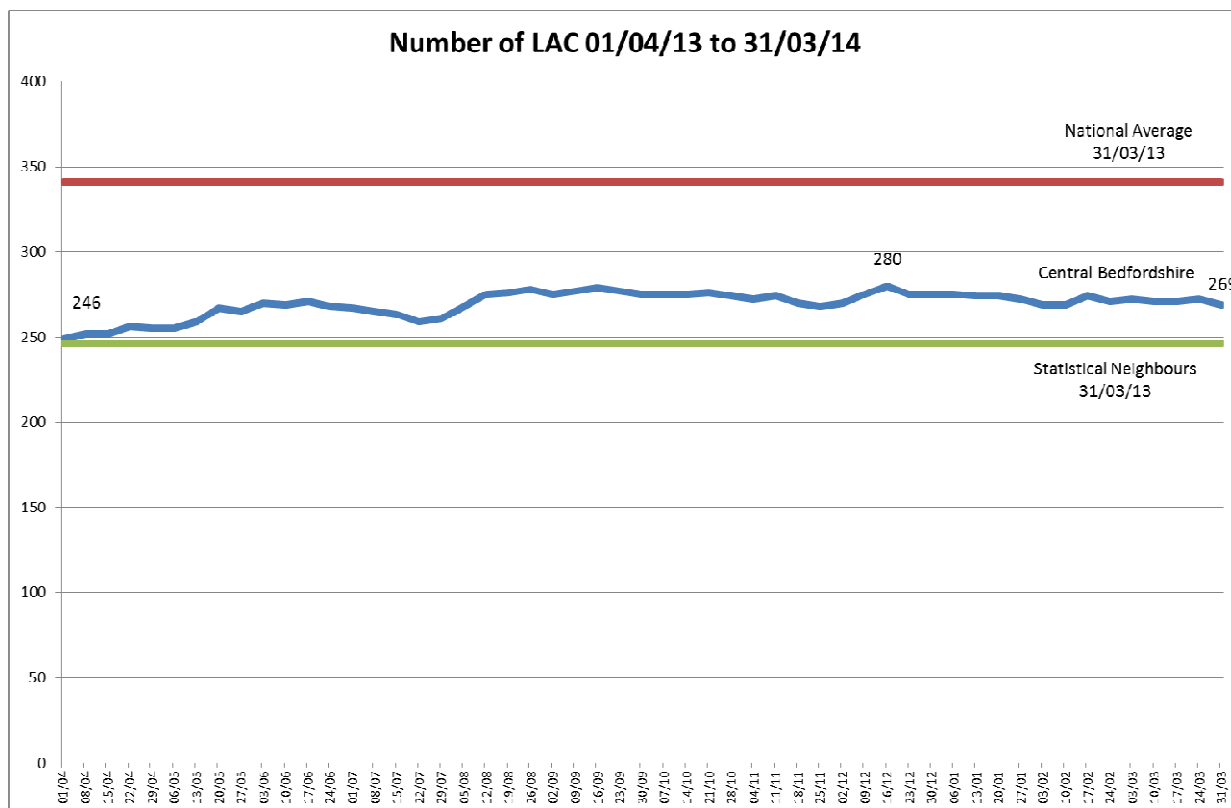
3.7 It is recognised that the documentation is not working as well as we would wish and two pieces of work are underway to review and improve written reports. A working group of IROs and Looked After Children team managers, together with the Children's Case Management team are seeking to optimise the way Frameworki supports practice in this area. The IRO service is consulting with the Children in Care Council on making the reports more child friendly.

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4.0 Quantitative Information about the IRO Service DRAFT DATA- yet to be validated

A total of 343 children have been through the review system in the 12 months ending 31.3.2014.

A total of 777 reviews were held in the year



4.1 The Looked After Children population over the year is shown above. The year end figure is currently reported as 268 up from 246 in March 2013. The comparison to national rates and statistical neighbours is also shown.

4.2 The IRO Handbook recommends that case loads for IROs need to be between 50 and 70. Nationally, the average caseload for a IROs ranges between 50 and 95 identified in a recent (December 2013) national benchmarking survey. The size of caseload alone does not indicate the workload for each IRO; the number of other responsibilities, the number of out of county placements, large family groups and complex case needs will also impact on the work load. The on-going monitoring of the case and the timeliness of case recording and administrative tasks can be compromised in times of workload pressures. There can also be variation in reporting where IRO and Child Protection responsibilities are shared. Using a per child measure caseloads in Central Bedfordshire Council have been as high as 80, when CP numbers were at their peak in summer/early autumn 2013. Since that time Child Protection numbers have reduced and staffing improved and IRO's are now averaging case loads of 63 which is within guidance and allows sufficient capacity for the overview role to be appropriately undertaken. It is this area of work and the timeliness of case recording and administrative tasks which are somewhat compromised in times of workload pressures.

4.3 Composition of the Looked After Children Population (*Provisional 21/05/14*)

Total **268**

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Ethnicity

	White	Mixed	Asian	Black	other
CBC Local School Population	89%	5%	2%	2%	1%
National Funded School Population 31/01/12	78%	4%	9%	5%	2%
CBC Children Looked After 31/03/14	85%	12%	0%	2%	1%
National Children Looked After 31/03/13	78%	9%	4%	7%	2%

Age

Age at 31 March 2014					
	BOYS	GIRLS	Total CBC	% CBC	National 31/03/13
Under 1	3	8	11	4%	6%
1-4	27	29	56	21%	18%
5-9	42	26	68	25%	19%
10-15	49	42	91	34%	36%
16-17	25	17	42	16%	20%
18 & over and placed in a community home	0	0	0		
TOTAL	146	122	268	100%	100%
CBC %	54%	46%			
31/03/13 National %	55%	45%			

Legal Status

Legal Status at 31 March 2014			
	CBC	% CBC	National 31/03/13
Care Orders Interim	35	13%	17%
Care Orders Full	114	43%	42%
Voluntary agreements under s.20 (single period of accommodation)	78	29%	27%
Placement Order	40	15%	14%
Sentenced to <i>CYPA 1969</i> supervision order with residence requirement	1	1%	-
On remand, committed for trial, or detained	0	0	-
Emergency orders or police protection	0	0	-
TOTAL	268	100%	100%

Placement

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Placement at 31 March 2014			
	CBC	% CBC	National 31/03/13
Foster placement with relative or friend	48	18%	75%
Placement with other foster carer	158	59%	
Secure Unit	0	11%	9%
Homes and hostels	27		
Hostels and other supportive residential placements	3		
Residential schools	2	1%	1%
Other residential settings	1	1%	1%
Placed for adoption (including placed with former foster carer)	14	5%	4%
Placed with own parents	1	1%	5%
In lodgings, residential employment or living independently	14	5%	5%
Absent from agreed placement	0	0%	-
Other placement	0	0%	-
TOTAL	268	100%	100%

5.0 Qualitative Information about the IRO Service

5.1 The Timeliness of Reviews

Our target for timeliness was 100%, which was not achieved.

As at 31 March 2014 98.9% (263/266) were held on time

This figure relates to the rolling year with definition from 903 returns "of those children who had been looked after for at least 20 working days, the percentage whose Reviews had all been on time over the past year". This indicator excludes children placed for adoption.

5.2 The timing of reviews is specified in regulation. The first review has to be held within 20 working days of the child/young person becoming looked after, the second within 3 months of the first. Subsequent reviews at intervals of no more than 6 months. Reviews will in addition be held if there is a significant change of circumstances or of the Care Plan.

5.3 There were 3 children and young people who were reported having a late review at the end of the year.

- One was a late report of a placement with a connected person, the child only reported as being looked after on day 20.
- One was an error when a review date was changed due to social worker's illness. An admin error led to a wrong due date being given to the IRO who did not spot the error and booked out of timescales.
- The third was also a date change error. The IRO and social worker had agreed to change but the planned date was cancelled without a confirmed date being re-booked. Neither the IRO, Social Worker nor the Administrator picked up the error until the due date had passed.

There is not currently a performance report which can identify this type of review date error. Reporting is retrospective. Development of a report that can identify planned date

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errors has been requested. In the absence of a reporting mechanism IRO's and administrators double check dates.

6.0 Children's Participation

- 6.1 The IRO Handbook states that it is expected that the child if s/he is of sufficient age and understanding will be present for the whole of the Review, but this will depend on the circumstances of each individual case. The IRO may decide, in consultation with the social worker that attendance of the child is not in the child's best interests. If the child does not attend, other arrangements should be made for their involvement. It is one of the specific responsibilities of the IRO to promote the voice of the child and to ensure their wishes and feelings are represented. It may be appropriate for a younger child to be observed or for the IRO to interact with that child through play or reading in a placement setting. If the child's first language is not English, as for example with the unaccompanied asylum seeking children an interpreter will be provided. A child with disabilities may perhaps be observed in school or placement and their needs and feelings be discussed with their carers if a direct conversation is not possible.
- 6.2 The Review Record will include information on how the child participates and how their wishes and feelings were included. Participation is monitored by recording a participation code. Children aged under 4 are excluded. For all other children it is expected that they should attend, or that their views should be represented.
- 6.3 An audit was undertaken in March 2014 in respect of twenty eight children and young people who had become newly looked after during October to December 2013 in order to assess compliance with the expectations that IRO's are seeing children, seeking their views and monitoring progress of the case.
- 6.4 In the majority of the cases the IRO did meet with the child separately 71% (20/28). This is improved on the previous audit of 62% and now includes an expectation to see all children, not just those aged 4 and over. In all cases for children aged four or over their views were ascertained and recorded as part of the review process. Younger children were in all but one case observed in placement, and a record of the observation was included in the review record. The child who was not seen was a new-born baby.

Attendance at the Review meeting varied according to the age of the child

Audit Findings				
Age Group	Under 4	4-10 years	11+ years	Total
Attended/ Present	2	1	6	9
Did not attend	9	9	1	19

IRO recording of case notes was evident in 19/28 cases (67%) A case note type of CRS case note was added to the electronic case record in January 2014 to facilitate easy identification of the IRO case overview. Audit findings have been fed back .It has been identified that for some workers this change of practice introduced last year has not become fully embedded. This will be monitored and further audited.

- 6.5 Participation is considered an important performance indicator. The outcome for participation is not yet available. The provisional figure is 98% Data quality checking is still in progress at the time of writing.
- 6.6 Data available has identified 5 children who did not participate in their reviews. An explanation of these five young people who did not participate is given below:

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- There are two young people who are unaccompanied asylum seekers who had been age assessed as 17 years. Both went missing very shortly after becoming looked after and have remained missing. One young person reached assessed age of 18 in February 2014 the other will do so in July 2014. CBC are revising the policy in respect to this group of young people such that in future if all appropriate checks have been made and there are no safeguarding concerns consideration can be made as to whether the young person should be considered to have de-accommodated themselves.
- A young man aged 17 declined to attend his final review in June 2013 also refusing to meet with the IRO or complete a consultation document. He is recorded as refusing to participate and wishing to dis-engage from services. He was 18 in October 2013.
- A 15 year old boy did not attend his November review which was held at school as he was unfortunately not in school that day. The IRO made 4 attempts to see him at his residential unit. On each occasion he chose to make other arrangements. He did participate in his subsequent review meeting individually with his IRO. It is possible the change of gender to a male IRO may have encouraged his engagement.
- A girl of 9 did not attend her first review in August 2013 which was held in the office. The plan was rehabilitation which was reported to be her wish and occurred in September 2013.

Appendix 1. Gives some examples of the illustrates way young people’s views are captured.

7.0 Parental Participation

7.1 The IRO Handbook advises that the IRO should seek the views of birth parents and any other adults with parental responsibility and other significant persons in the child’s life, for example extended family members. Parent’s active participation is achieved through attendance, completion of a consultation booklet, representation via an advocate or in writing or consultation by phone or in person with the IRO separately from the review meeting. The record of the review notes those attending and those consulted as part of the review process. The IRO records qualitative information and feedback on the quality of practice in respect of appropriate involvement of parents and extended family. Quantitative data is now recorded on the database; this was not available last year. As this is a new reporting facility there has not been in year validation. Going forward we will have monthly reporting which will give a more detailed breakdown and allow for monthly data validation, which will improve the quality and detail of the information.

Parental attendance at the review	Parental consultation	Parents deceased or whereabouts unknown.
48%	78%	6%

The parental consultation figure includes the 48% who actually attended the review.

8.0 Service User Feedback

8.1 IROs will respond promptly and informally to questions and queries arising from young people their parents and carers, often through a telephone conversation. On most occasions discussion and explanation resolve the matter.

When complaints do arise, they are often part of a wider complaint about Children’s Services actions in which case (CRS) have contribute to the response. Conference and

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Review have also responded to feedback from individual families and young people Issues that have arisen are:

- Concern about the wording of a review record. This resulted in either an amendment or facilitation of the differing opinions being reflected and noted.
 - Management of parental participation in the review process. This issue has arisen previously and investigation has identified two areas for improvement in respect of communication.
- a) Firstly the wording of the consultation leaflet has been revised.
 - b) Secondly the IRO Manager is part of a working group with Customer Relations drawing up guidance for staff on managing service users who present persistent challenges, following investigation of the complaint and an outcome being achieved.

9.0 The Conduct of the Organisation in Relation to the Review

- 9.1 Conference and Review (CRS) sit within the Quality Assurance Service of Children's Social Care and the quality assurance role is central to the IRO's responsibilities. The IRO is responsible for monitoring the performance of the Local Authority, including effective challenge of poor practice, and has a crucial role in ensuring that the Council fulfils its responsibilities as a corporate parent for all the children it looks after.
- 9.2 The IRO completes two monitoring forms after each LAC Review. One of these sits within the Frameworki review episode and records information about the arrangements, who has been consulted, participation by parents and children, completion of required documentation, Health Assessment Personal Education Plan, and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. In addition a word form gives qualitative feedback in respect of care planning, children's participation, and appropriate involvement with family and partnership working with other agencies.
- 9.3 The line manager receives both feedback forms. Feedback on practice will include good practice as well as any areas of concern. The line manager will share with the social worker in supervision and if any identified actions are needed ensure these are completed.
- 9.4 Conference and Review hold monthly Quality Assurance meetings with each of the fieldwork teams. A fostering manager also attends which helps to pick up any concerns within placement. A summary report is provided by CRS which is also circulated to the relevant heads of service. This process ensures that feedback on practice is shared with the individual worker and manager and an overview is given to heads of service.

10.0 Conduct of the Organisation in Relation to the Case

Procedures for Resolution of Concerns

- 10.1 The Central Bedfordshire Conference and Review Service focuses on immediate problem solving with social workers and team managers whenever possible and will always begin to address issues in a constructive co-operative manner. Central Bedfordshire already has in place a Quality Assurance process described above through which most concerns will continue to be raised and resolved.
- 10.2 However the IRO Handbook strengthens the role of the IRO and requires the authority to have a formal Disputes Resolution Policy.

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- 10.3 In the guidance, the IRO has a duty to monitor the Local Authority's performance overall, not just in respect of the review of the child/young person's case. So, the IRO should identify poor practice, and must negotiate with the Local Authority's managers up to the highest level. The IRO is required to consider a referral to the Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service, where the child/young person's human rights have not been observed. It is not necessary for all efforts to resolve the dispute through this process to have been unsuccessful, before the IRO does this; rather, it is anticipated that referral to CAFCASS will usually occur when a dispute raised through this process has not been resolved in a timely way.
- 10.4 If an IRO considers that a matter involves a breach of a child's human rights the matter should immediately be raised as a formal dispute.
- 10.5 Most other concerns will be raised with the Team Manager through the existing Quality Assurance process. A 'RAG system' is now in place and ensuring that more urgent or serious matters are highlighted. Going forward information will be collated to allow reporting of RAG data by month and by team.
- 10.6 A failure to respond or a failure to resolve a concern through the QA process will lead to a formal dispute being raised, in accordance with the dispute resolution procedure.
- 10.7 Most concerns continue to be raised and resolved through our quality assurance process. Areas of concern that have been identified have included the following issues:
- Late / poor quality case recording
 - Timescales / responses on Frameworki
 - Concerns re contact
 - Concerns re pathway plans/ care plans
 - Failure to consult with IROs
 - Concerns about the services offered to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
 - Concerns about timely progression of life-story work

The use of the formal dispute resolution process and the interface between the informal and formal process has been inconsistent and will be reviewed.

The follow-up and feedback mechanism within the QA process has been revised and is working well, but there is a need to clarify further the nature and timing of referral into the formal process.

11.0 Any resource Issues that are putting at risk the delivery of a quality service for Looked after Children

- 11.1 Capacity within the IRO service had become stretched by the increasing numbers of Children on Child Protection Plans in the summer of 2013, but with both increased resource in CRS and a reduction in CP numbers, CRS are now appropriately resourced to deliver an effective IRO service.
- 11.2 Staff turnover and the use of agency staff, particularly if short-term both within CRS and in the Looked After Children's Teams has been identified as an issue that can adversely impact on the quality of service to children and young people. Young people require continuity in their relationships with their social workers and IRO's and staff changes whilst sometimes unavoidable are detrimental. This is recognised and is being addressed.

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12.0 Children in particular circumstances

Children Missing from Care and Children at Risk of Harm

- 12.1 Of those children who go missing 25% are at risk of harm and sexual exploitation. There are particular concerns about the links between children running away and the risks of sexual exploitation and concerns such as drug and alcohol misuse and violent crime. Looked After Children missing from their placements are particularly vulnerable. Independent Reviewing Officers are advised by social workers whenever a young person they are reviewing is missing from placement. Social work managers ensure day to day oversight and tracking of young people who are missing and hold timely multi agency strategy meeting to co-ordinate attempts to locate young people and plan for their return. When concerns escalate, the stability of a placement is threatened or the placement can no longer keep a young person safe, IROs are advised mid review of the issues and can request an early review.
- 12.2 Where there are concerns regarding children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation IROs can encourage practitioners to refer individual children to the Child Sexual Exploitation Panel. These are multi-agency information sharing meeting meetings, which support agencies to implement plans to respond to child sexual exploitation and prevent the risk of harm to children by proactively seeking to disrupt the behaviour of those seeking to exploit others and advise on preventative and safety measures for those most at risk. All young people looked after by Central Bedfordshire Council from the age of 11+ have been risk assessed by using a sexual exploitation assessment matrix by their social worker. This assessment is reviewed every 6 months by the team and is available for the IRO to review as apart of the LAC review process.

Children placed outside the Council Area

- 12.3 19.1%* of Central Bedfordshire's looked after population are placed in another local authority and more than 20 miles from their home address. Local authorities in which the children are placed if not Central Bedfordshire are advised that a Central Bedfordshire child has moved into their area. Central Bedfordshire and the IROs retain responsibility for the child and their care plan. All children placed out of council area are visited at least once every six months by their IRO and encouraged to contact their IRO between reviews should they wish to talk to someone independent of their case and/or they have concerns. Referral to the Independent Visitor Service is encouraged for children where appropriate.

* (48/251 total looked after children at year end with a distance from home identified)

13.0 Annual Work Programme of the IRO Service i.e. Priority Areas for Improvement

- 13.1 The Quality Assurance Service Plan for 2013/14 incorporated actions arising from the work strands in the 2012 Ofsted Improvement Plan. In addition it addressed improvements identified by the externally commissioned Peer Review of 2013 and the revised Quality Assurance Framework.
- 13.2 The IRO service held a facilitated workshop to identify strengths and areas for development within the service and in the way the service works with the front line teams contributing to improving the quality and consistency of the council's services for looked after children and improving their outcomes.
- 13.3 The need to improve the effectiveness of the Quality Assurance Feedback loop has been identified. The monitoring form was revised to reflect Ofsted grading's and we undertook an exercise with managers to engage them and test thresholds. Concerns about consistent attendance at Quality Assurance liaison meetings were raised with Heads of

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Service and have improved. From CRS instead of having a rota for attendance we have introduced linked Review Managers to service areas to improve consistency and follow through. Preparation for the meetings has been improved by advance circulation of a summary document. In response to this teams are attending with updated information ensuring that issues are not just noted but resolved.

- 13.4 Research In Practice facilitated an away day for the IRO service, jointly with Bedford Borough IROs to consider the development of the IRO role and service in the light of legislative and policy changes and informed by research. The review of research, which included the findings of the Ofsted thematic audit, was followed by workshop time for Central Bedfordshire IROs to develop their own action plan. Work strands were identified in respect of the voice of the child, care planning, care proceedings, skills and Continuous Professional Development and challenge and independence.
- 13.5 The IRO Service are working with the Children in care Council seeking children's views on the way the IRO service consults and involves young people in their reviews, ensures they are informed about the IRO role and are aware of how they can contact their IRO and how their IRO will keep in contact with them .
- 13.6 We have introduced a CRS case note to ensure IRO contacts with the child and their family are recorded and that IRO case monitoring and where necessary challenge is also recorded.
- 13.7 The IRO service has worked with the LAC service and Cafcass and with Legal Services to implement the changes arising from the new Public Law Outline process. There is now good liaison with Cafcass and Central Bedfordshire Council is implementing the Cafcass /IRO protocol.
- 13.8 The need for training and development opportunities has been recognised. Together with neighbouring authorities and Cafcass a workshop was commissioned from BAAF on sibling assessments which were offered to IROs, Children's Guardians and Social Workers.
- 13.9 The Quality Assurance Service Plan for 2014/15 will incorporate further actions arising from the National Children's Bureau Report. The report found that the role in ensuring high quality care planning has yet to be fully realised. The fundamental ingredient is the importance of listening to children and ensuring independent challenge. The IRO must be on the side of the child. The report identifies six key factors that support an effective service.
- Professional status and respect, demonstrated both by resourcing the service properly and by openly giving IROs 'permission' to challenge
 - IROs with the right skills. Particularly the ability to communicate with children and young people and to know how and when to challenge
 - Access to expert advice, including independent legal advice and opportunities for reflective practice
 - Dispute resolution protocols that work. From informal conversations to the escalation of cases to senior management
 - Child-centred IROs who demonstrate their commitment to each child and work out the best way to seek their views
 - Having a focus on outcomes, and holding agencies to account for their contribution towards these, rather than 'box-ticking
- 13.10 The report makes recommendations at National, Local Authority and service level. In Central Bedfordshire we are in a good position in respect of the areas identified and already have some improvement measures in place.

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- Commissioning role specific training and support
- Maintaining contact with children and young people and recording in the case record
- Holding workshops with the Children in Care Council to gain feedback from children and young people.
- Undertake direct observations of IRO practice through peer and management observations.

The recommendations for the IRO Service will be incorporated into the Service Plan and IRO Personal Development Reviews. The IRO Manager together with the Head of Service and Assistant Director will review and recommendations made at local authority area and identify areas for development.

Report prepared by
Isabel Wilks
Team Manager
Conference and Review Service

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Appendix 1

Case examples illustrating how the child's views are sought and evidenced

1. **Child A**, a boy of 15 in a local residential placement. **A** had declined to attend his last review and declined four attempts by his IRO to meet with him. As his IRO was then leaving it was decided to allocate a Male IRO in the hope that **A** would respond more positively to a male worker. Mark has been his IRO for six months, since he joined CBC in December. Mark visited **A** in placement to introduce himself and follow-up on the review **A** had declined to attend. **A** engaged well on this visit and there was a discussion about possible 16 plus options. A second planned visit was re-arranged at **A**'s request. This took place before the next LAC review. At this visit his views about his placement, contact, school and his pathway plan were discussed. **A** agreed to chair his own LAC review. At the review **A** followed a written agenda, and guided the meeting, giving the professionals present the opportunity to speak. **A** as chair was able to put across his own views and join in discussions too. Feedback is being sought from **A** as to how he found this experience and whether he has any suggestions that would improve the process.

2. **Child B**, a girl of 16 in semi-independent accommodation. **B** had become looked after aged 14 due to concerns about her mother's ability to keep her safe, she was out of school experimenting with drugs and alcohol and was sexually active. Laura has been her IRO throughout the three years since she became looked after, which has been helpful in providing continuity as she has had seven key-workers. Laura has maintained contact with **B** and with her family. **B** has e-mailed Laura to ask for help with problems with her placement. Laura has advocated on her behalf. **B** attends and participates fully in her review meetings.

3. **Child C** A girl aged 16 placed in an out of area residential setting. **C** has significant learning difficulties and challenging behaviour. She has previously been in secure accommodation and has an offending history. She is a vulnerable young person but can present a risk to others.
 Jenny has been her IRO since she became looked after in January 2012. Jenny meets with **C** before her reviews and **C** likes to participate. However she also finds it hard to manage being in a meeting with a large number of professionals and does not like there to be discussion about her areas of difficulty. After becoming quite agitated at a previous review it was agreed to manage her next review as a process with professionals meeting first at the Youth Offending Team offices and this being followed by a smaller meeting at her placement with **C**, unit staff, IRO, Social Worker and brief input from one other key professional. This worked well and **C** managed this very well. She was focussed and polite through out, was clear in giving her views and kept her cool even when the CAMHS worker said things she did not like.

4. **Child D** A girl aged 3 who was placed with her Grandmother following concerns about domestic violence and substance misuse and her mother's mental health difficulties. Rosie had been the conference chair and then became **D**'s IRO when she became looked after. **D** did not participate in her reviews due to her young age. She was observed in placement. Rosie observed her interactions with her maternal grandmother and commented that the attachment was very evident and **D** presented as happy and settled. She observed Grandmother to be responsive to **D** and committed to meeting her needs and supporting her return home if achievable.

Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date: 21 July 2014

Subject: Access to Suitable Accommodation for Care Leavers

Report of: Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Children's Services

Summary: This report seeks to update the Corporate Parenting Panel in respect of the legislative duties required to meet sufficient accommodation for care leavers. This report updates on a presentation to the Panel at its meeting of 03 February 2014.

Advising Officer: None

Contact Officer: Gerard Jones – Assistant Director, Operations

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The Report supports the following Council priorities:

- Enhancing Central Bedfordshire – creating jobs, managing growth, protecting our countryside and enabling businesses to grow.
- Promote health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable.
- Improve educational attainment.

Financial:

1. Financial costs relating to accommodation for Looked After Children up to the age of 18 is funded entirely from the social care budget. For care leavers from the age of 18 the housing costs i.e. rent/council tax are entirely met through housing benefit.

Legal:

2. The Council has a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children it looks after regardless of where they live. When a Looked After Child reaches 18 years old they become care leavers and are no longer in the care of the local authority. In accordance with the duties outlined in the Leaving Care Act 2000, care leavers are entitled to access local authority housing support.
3. Care leavers are entitled to housing accommodation under band B the Quota Housing Scheme operated by Central Bedfordshire Council.
4. Central Bedfordshire Council is expected to accommodate any homeless young person [aged 16-18 year olds] under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 where it is assessed that they are a child in need whenever it is determined that the young person has nowhere else to reside and there is no appropriate adult to care for them.

Risk Management:

5. Central Bedfordshire Council ensures that all young people looked after [16 years -18 years] are accommodated in safe & suitable accommodation

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

6. Not Applicable

Equalities/Human Rights:

7. All looked after children and care leavers will be offered safe & suitable accommodation appropriate to their needs. Assessments to determine accommodation needs take into account the young person's independence skills, their ethnicity and disability.

Public Health

8. Good housing has a positive impact on the physical health and emotional well being of young people.

Community Safety:

9. Not Applicable.

Sustainability:

10. Not Applicable.

Procurement:

11. Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

1. **Note the contents of this report and the steps identified to improve outcomes for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.**

- 2. Support the establishment of a Care Leavers Accommodation Working Group, with representatives from housing, adult social care, health, children's social care and the independent and voluntary sector. The Head of Corporate Parenting will chair the Working Group.**
- 3. Support the establishment of the Terms of Reference of the Care Leavers Accommodation Working Group in relation to the following:**
 - To ascertain the views, wishes and feelings of Children Looked After and Care Leavers.**
 - To review evidence and monitor current process and ways of working from a results/outcomes perspective, to develop an Improvement Plan**
 - To develop an Improvement Plan**
 - To maximise the benefits of collaboration and joint working**
 - To strengthen local partnerships**
 - To address specific issues to improve housing outcomes for care leavers**
 - To input directly into the new Annual Lettings Plan being developed, so as to establish a Quota of properties that shall be available to Children Leaving Care, as well as Foster Parents and adopters.**

Introduction/Background

Looked after children and care leavers

12. The term 'looked after' refers to any child or young person for whom the Council has, or shares, parental responsibility, or for whom the Council provides care and accommodation on behalf of their parent. The term "child" can refer to any child or young person aged 0 to 18 years. The Council also has a duty and responsibility to those young people who leave their long-term care from the age of 16 years until they reach the age of 21, or 25 if they are in higher education.
13. A data pack has been developed by the Department of Education relating to care leavers, similar to the comparative data sets already produced for Adoption and the Education of Looked After Children. This will assist the Council to review its policies and benchmark its performance.
14. The data pack underlines the clear links between good outcomes for care leavers, the number of placement moves and the age when young people leave care. There are currently two outcome indicators for care leavers. These measure the percentage of young people in suitable accommodation and those in Education, Employment or Training. Both are reported on at age 19.
15. The performance indicator measures the number of care leavers at the age of 19 in suitable accommodation. Our local target for 2013-14 was 90% we achieved 89% (this was because 3 of the young people in the cohort where asylum seeking young adults who due to their negative asylum decision have absconded).

Current Situation and Presenting Accommodation Issues

Transitional Placements

16. Where young people living in their primary placements (Residential Children's Homes or Foster Care) are assessed as requiring a semi-independent placement as a 'stepping stone' from care to independent placements, a range of semi-independent options are available. These options are:
 - i. Registered Providers of Social Housing including the Council as a landlord
 - ii. Supported Lodgings
 - iii. 'Staying Put'
 - iv. Private Semi-Independent Accommodation Providers
17. Accommodation and support provided by Registered Social Landlords and Private Semi Independent Accommodation Providers is not regulated by Ofsted. However, the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 and related Guidance sets out requirements for local authorities to develop a new inspection and monitoring framework in order to ensure appropriate standards are in place.
18. There is a gap in our current sufficiency provision in that we do not have enough providers who are "regulated" [by the local authority] in order to meet the needs of our care leavers and as a result some of our young people are remaining in residential children's home for longer than they should due to the lack of supported accommodation provisions.
19. There is an urgent need to commission a sufficient range of semi-independent and independent living accommodation choices for this cohort of young people

Independent Accommodation

20. Care leavers are referred for permanent housing only when they are ready to manage and maintain their own tenancy. In order to ensure that all care leavers are ready to live independently and manage a tenancy when they turn 18, Social Workers & Personal Advisors need to evidence that the nominated young people have the appropriate life skills. These include a broad range of practical skills, emotional resilience, an assessment of their support requirements to enable them to engage with education, employment. These elements are essential in managing a successful transition to adulthood, including managing and maintaining their tenancies.
21. Where young people are assessed to have the life skills required to sustain independent accommodation by the age of 18, a system is in place whereby young people move directly to permanent local authority housing or housing association accommodation. The Housing Directorate in Central Bedfordshire use the choice based lettings system of allocating tenancies.

Actions undertaken

22. This report provides an update regarding actions that are currently being undertaken to advance accommodation options for care leavers as a result of the recommendations made at the Corporate Parenting Panel held in February 2014

23. The Support for Success Panel Meeting in partnership with Youth Support Service currently tracks all 15-21 (or 25) year old young people making sure they access further education, training and employment. The Panel will expand to monitor the placement and move on arrangements for all young people in this cohort. Particular attention has been paid to placement planning where young people are living outside their 'originating housing authority' and where young people will need a supported accommodation setting when they reach the age of 18. The aim of the meeting is to ensure that there is a co-ordinated approach to address the placement and accommodation needs of all children looked after and care leavers aged 16 plus. In addition, the Panel monitors and tracks the detailed move-on plans for all care leavers aged over 17 and 6 months, all young people in high cost placements and those with complex placement needs.
24. We are paying all our care leavers a £2,000 setting up home allowance when they are ready to live independently.
25. To ensure that young people have the necessary life skills to sustain independent accommodation, we are undertaking in partnership with fostering services, including IFA's, and supported independent providers to ensure they provide evidence of the independence skills young people have developed.
26. A Preparation for Independence Life Skill Programme is being developed with the Youth Support Service. The Programme will be developed in partnership with foster carers, supported lodgings carers and staff working across the complete range of children looked after and care leaving services. In addition, the Programme will be piloted with young people, placement and accommodation providers and a broad range of community organisations. Training will be provided on the use of the Programme and mechanisms in place to review and update the progress of each young person. The primary aim of the programme is to assist with the development of life skills, promote resilience and develop skills to sustain tenancies.
27. In order to meet our sufficiency duty and provide a sufficient range of supported accommodation for care leavers we undertook a tendering exercise in March 2014 that will provide:
 - i. Contracts in place by June 2014 with a select group of 16+ providers who will offer placements based on a common service specification and have been able to evidence suitable qualitative information.
 - ii. A robust, scored, quality assurance process including written submissions. Interviews with young people were done jointly with the Children in Care Council [CiCC]. Young people were involved in drawing up the specification and a workshop was held to obtain feedback from the members; this was included in the tender document. The CiCC members were also involved in giving a presentation to providers as well as shortlisting them against framework criteria.
 - iii. Additional scrutiny on quality that will raise standards of providers and improve outcomes for young people. Unlike fostering and children's homes provision that is regulated and inspected by Ofsted, there is no similar statutory regulatory framework for 16+ supported accommodations.
 - iv. Improved value for money and clarity in terms of what services are included in standard costs.
 - v. Improved placement data, market intelligence and consequent ability of local authorities to manage the market.

28. Care leavers are entitled to housing accommodation under Band B of the Quota Housing Scheme operated by Central Bedfordshire Council. A new allocation policy was approved by Executive in May 2014, which has highlighted care leavers as a vulnerable group.
29. A Housing Group will be set up whose focus will be to scrutinise current processes, maximise the benefits of local partnerships & address specific issues to improve housing outcomes for care leavers. An integral aspect of this work will be to:
- i. Ascertain the views, wishes and feelings of Children Looked After & Care Leavers.
 - ii. Review evidence and monitor current process and ways of working from a results/outcomes perspective, to development an Improvement Plan
 - iii. Maximise the benefits of collaboration and joint working
 - iv. Strengthen local partnerships
 - v. Address specific issues to improve housing outcomes for care leavers
 - vi. Input directly into the new Annual Lettings Plan being developed, so as to establish a Quota of properties that shall be available to Children Leaving Care, as well as Foster Parents and adopters.
 - vii. Support the Housing allocation policy for LAC/Care Leavers
 - viii. Supported accommodation provision for looked after children at 16 – become less dependant on private providers
 - ix. Joint housing protocol between Looked After Children Services and Housing.
 - x. Outreach support for young people living in their own tenancy for the first 3-6 months.
 - xi. New build provision and making sure we evidence that requirement to deliver as a result of s106 agreements for affordable housing (i.e. specialist provision)
 - xii. Promote shared houses – as a model – for people who are low risk, or close to establishing full independence
30. The Annual Lettings Plan will be used to determine how the predictable resource of lettings (approximately 1000 per annum) will be used. The purpose of the ALP is to “make the best use of stock”. It is envisaged that approximately 2/3rds of lets will continue to be let through CBL, whilst about 1/3 of lets will be used on the basis of direct lets, transfers and quota.
31. The Council will make a percentage of annual lets available to certain groups of applicants, via quota schemes. These quotas will be set out in an Annual Lettings Plan. Groups likely to be subject to a quota include:
- i. Foster carers and adopters, as well as looked after children
 - ii. Clients with mental health issues, but ready to move on from supported housing schemes
 - iii. Clients with learning disabilities, but ready to move on from supported housing schemes
 - iv. Others to be identified as part of consultation with partner agencies

Conclusion

32. This report has identified a need for a longer-term strategic approach to address the affordable housing issues facing young people in Central Bedfordshire. It has

suggested some first order priorities to widen the housing offer for young people through innovation in flexible tenure and new sharing options, streamlining commissioning and delivery of housing related services and increasing the capacity of young people, in particular vulnerable young people.

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

None

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