

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

**This meeting
may be filmed.***



**Central
Bedfordshire**

please ask for Leslie Manning
direct line 0300 300 5132
date 20 November 2014

NOTICE OF MEETING

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Date & Time

Monday, 1 December 2014 at 10.30 a.m.

Venue at

Room 15, Priory House, Chicksands, Shefford

Richard Carr
Chief Executive

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

Elected Members (voting)

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

[Named Substitutes:

Cllrs P N Aldis, Mrs D B Gurney, K Janes, B Saunders and A M Turner]

Officers (voting)

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.

***Please note that phones or other equipment may be used to film, audio record, tweet or blog from this meeting. No part of the meeting room is exempt from public filming.**

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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 13 October 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.	Engagement and Involvement of Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) To consider how Children's Services are responding to the requirements of the Children and Families Act 2014 with regard to the inclusion of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in the development of the Local Offer.	* 23 - 48
6.	Children in Care Council - Update To receive a verbal update from the Children in Care Council.	
7.	Out of County Residential Placements To receive a presentation on the use of residential placements outside Central Bedfordshire together with the related monitoring and quality assurance measures.	* 49 - 56

8. **Interim Report of the Virtual School for Looked After Children** * 57 - 74

To consider a report on the role of the Virtual School, the indicative outcomes for Looked After Children in the Academic Year 2013/14, the steps taken since 2013 to develop the role of the Virtual School in order to improve outcomes for Looked After Children and young people and the next stages in its development.

9. **Quarter Two Report on the Fostering Service** * 75 - 82

To consider a report outlining the activities in the Fostering Service during the second quarter of the 2014-15 financial year.

10. **Six Monthly Report on the Adoption Service - April to September 2014** * 83 - 98

To consider a report outlining activity in the Adoption Service during April – September 2014.

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Room 15, Priory House, Chicksands, Shefford on Monday, 13 October 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
N J Sheppard
B Wells

Officers (voting)

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

Carers (non-voting)

Mrs J Crawford
Mrs H Philips MBE

Apologies for Absence: **Officers (voting)**

Mrs J Dickinson - Head of Leisure and Libraries

Members in Attendance: Cllrs P N Aldis
J G Jamieson

Officers in Attendance: Mr N Costin – Head of Housing Solutions
Ms A Craig – Fostering Team Manager
Mr G Jones – Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
Mr T Keaveney – Assistant Director Housing Services
Mr L Manning – Committee Services Officer
Ms M Short – Participation Officer
Mr E Wong – Head of Corporate Parenting

Others in Attendance: Children in Care Council Representative

CPP/14/19. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 21 July 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CPP/14/20. Members' Interests

None.

CPP/14/21. Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman reported on the recent Foster Carer Awards evening at Woburn Safari Park. He thanked the Head of Corporate Parenting and his team for their efforts which had resulted in an excellent event and the raising of public awareness with regard to foster carer work.

The Chairman reminded the meeting of the forthcoming Children in Care Council annual awards evening on 24 October.

CPP/14/22. Children in Care Council - Presentation

The Panel received a presentation from the Children in Care Council (CiCC) representative which updated the meeting on the following matters:

- The CiCC & Young Voices
- Passport to Independence
- The Key Messages
- Summer Activities Programme
- The Frontline Programme
- Frontline Feedback
- CiCC Work
- Future Work

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

In addition an example of a box which represented a social worker's 'Tool Box' was circulated for Members' examination.

During the introduction by the CiCC representative Members raised various questions and made a number of comments. In response to a query by the Chairman on the provision of information on entitlements by social workers the CiCC representative stated that, whilst there had been improvements, both social workers and personal advisors needed to keep up to date with this information. She also advised of her own move back into employment.

Arising from a Member's query the meeting considered the development opportunities available for Looked After Children (LAC) and young people and the encouragement and support that they received. The challenges they experienced were also discussed. A Member referred to the Council's apprenticeship scheme and the work experience available. However, the CiCC representative explained the financial downside of accepting an apprenticeship offer. The Chairman commented that, whilst the Council was committed to providing apprenticeships and prioritising availability to Looked After Children

and young people, it was apparent from the CiCC representative's response why there could be a reluctance to take up these positions.

A Member emphasised the need to supply more information to young people on how apprenticeships could affect their life in a beneficial way and what financial assistance was available to them. The meeting noted that the apprenticeships were also open to those young persons fostered through an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA). The Participation Officer stated that relevant information had been sent directly to LAC and young people.

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations advised of the alternatives to undertaking an apprenticeship to gain workplace experience.

The Participation Officer referred to the highly beneficial experience gained by Looked After Children by working in the CiCC as this helped to develop their portfolio. The CiCC representative stated that this had been a major contributory factor in her gaining employment.

The Chairman commented on the presence of only one CiCC representative at the meeting and raised the issue of whether the Panel's times and dates required revision. In response the Participation Officer suggested that meetings be held during the day at half term.

NOTED

the presentation by the Children in Care Council representative.

CPP/14/23. Update Report: Fees and Allowances for Foster Carers

Members considered a report from the Executive Member for Children's Services which provided an update with regard to the implementation of the Foster Carer's Fee Scheme introduced on 1 April 2014.

The report was introduced by the Fostering Team Manager who drew the meeting's attention to the implementation of the new Scheme to date, its benefits and the impact on the recruitment of in-house foster carers mindful of the adopted aim of reducing the number of Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements. She stressed that all foster carer applicant assessments were completed within a six month timescale which meant that any obvious benefits in recruitment arising from the Scheme would not be apparent until October/November 2014. However, the Fostering Team Manager was able to refer to the recruitment activities undertaken since April and the increase in recruitment enquiries up from 62 for the period April to July 2013, when the service worked as a joint one with Bedford Borough Council, to the same period in 2014 when Central Bedfordshire's stand alone service received 104 enquiries. Further, there were currently 15 fostering carer assessments in progress.

In response to a query by the Chairman the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations and the Fostering Team Manager both confirmed that the recruitment figure for in-house carers was on target to be met. The Assistant

Director also referred to the work undertaken by the Head of Corporate Parenting to bring teams together and implement a joined up approach to recruitment.

Discussion then turned to efforts to increase the range and capacity of carers as well as their overall number, the migration of some IFA carers towards the Council and the difference in local authority and IFA approaches regarding the consistency of foster carer placements. During the discussion concern was expressed by a foster carer representative regarding her personal experience of the quality of support offered by the Council to its foster carers during times of need in comparison to that offered by an IFA. In response the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations undertook to fully examine the issues she had raised. The Chairman requested that he be kept fully informed.

A Member was of the opinion that a focus on targets was incorrect and that, instead, the focus should be on improving support and experience for foster carers and the Looked After Children and young people. She was also of the opinion that some members of the public did not understand what fostering involved and the Council failed to fully explain this. In response the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations acknowledged the importance of quality of service but explained that aspirational targets were necessary to increase carer numbers, range and capacity and reduce the need for local children to be placed out of area and/or with IFAs. However, he also acknowledged that there were some enquiries on becoming a foster carer which revealed a lack of public awareness and which did not proceed. The Fostering Team Manager confirmed that quality of service standards were robust and stated that the intention was to educate members of the public on the role of foster carers and, through this, encourage recruitment.

A foster carer representative expressed concern that some carers undertook fostering because of the financial rewards rather than to benefit the children. The Chairman also expressed concern that some foster carers had been attracted to the role for financial reasons. In response the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations stressed that IFAs were not solely financially focused. Further, the government was not going to constrain the market by limiting the role of IFAs and so the Council had to attempt to encourage carers or potential carers to work for it. As such, the Council needed to ensure that carers were properly supported and rewarded. He stated that he would welcome any new ideas regarding this. The Fostering Team Manager stressed that the consideration of foster carer applications focused on motivation and those applications that appeared driven by other matters, such as financial reward, would not be progressed.

Following further Member comment, and on behalf of the Panel, the Chairman expressed congratulations to the Head of Corporate Parenting, the Fostering Team Manager and the other officers involved for their achievements.

NOTED

the progress made in the implementation of the new Foster Carers' Fee Scheme.

RESOLVED

that an update report on the impact of the Foster Carer's Fee Scheme be submitted to the Corporate Parenting Panel meeting on 2 February 2015.

(Note: the meeting adjourned at 11.50 a.m. and reconvened at 11.55 a.m.)

CPP/14/24. Meeting the Housing and Support Needs of Vulnerable Young People

The Panel considered a report from the Director of Social Care, Health and Housing which provided an additional perspective to the report on the provision of accommodation to care leavers submitted to the Panel on 21 July 2014 (minute CPP/14/18 refers) and to the presentation to the Panel on 3 February 2014 (minute CPP/13/38 refers).

The report outlined the strategic drivers that were acting to bring the Children's Services and Social Care, Health and Housing Directorates into closer collaboration and discussed the emerging strategic and operational response from a Housing service perspective. In addition the report set those activities in context by outlining the barriers that care leavers and vulnerable young people experienced in their access to housing including the potential 'blockages' within the system.

The Assistant Director Housing Services introduced the report, highlighting and developing issues for consideration. He also emphasised that meeting the housing and support needs of care leavers and vulnerable young people was the responsibility of the whole Council and that only the whole Council, acting with a unified approach could, ultimately, meet the demands emanating from this area.

The Assistant Director Housing Services referred to the need to optimise the supply of new build housing but added that new developments were not necessarily in those areas which were suitable for use by care leavers and vulnerable young people. Instead he suggested the use of commuted sums for the development of infill sites in established communities. The Director of Social Care, Health and Housing also referred to the challenge of understanding the need and the type and location of suitable accommodation and ensuring that this information was communicated to partners and stakeholders across the Council, especially to those responsible for planning.

Discussion took place on the circumstances leading to tenancy failure by care leavers and the importance of semi independent accommodation, especially for younger care leavers, as an opportunity to gain life skills before moving to fully independent accommodation. The meeting noted the input from the Children in Care Council representative. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations emphasised that, if possible, foster placements were retained for young people until post 18 mindful that there was a background of young care leavers losing their accommodation and becoming homeless as a result of premature entry into the adult world. Members concurred with this approach, drawing on personal family experience in support of young people remaining in

foster care with their families whenever possible and until they were suitably experienced.

The Panel welcomed the report and expressed its support for the content.

RESOLVED

that an update report relating to the Improvement Plan being developed by the Corporate parenting Operations Group be submitted to the Corporate Parenting Panel in October 2015.

NOTED

- 1 the closer operational collaboration between Housing and Children's Services colleagues in order to improve the Council's approach to housing and supporting Care Leavers/Looked After Children;**
- 2 the need to provide for-:**
 - a) access to accommodation (supported housing and permanent settled accommodation) including needs assessment, advice and problem resolution**
 - b) access to appropriate support services to enable young people to secure and then maintain their accommodation**
 - c) Tenancy Sustainment, to manage risk and avoid tenancy failure or crisis**
- 3 the wider context in which the Housing Service operates to provide services to a broader cohort of Young People requiring housing assistance;**
- 4 the commitment of colleagues in the Social Care, Health and Housing Directorate to the establishment of a Corporate Parenting Operations Group, its proposed Terms of Reference and the proposed Improvement Plan;**
- 5 the importance of additional provision of accommodation based supported housing services for young people, that can be achieved through the affordable housing programme and the Housing Service Investment Plan, where the aims are specifically:**
 - a) to create new supply so as to improve access to mainstream accommodation with support**
 - b) to create new supply so as to improve access to supported accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds and 18+ Care Leavers.**

CPP/14/25. **Central Bedfordshire Council Looked After Children Annual Health Report - 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014**

The Panel considered a report from the Director of Nursing and Quality NHS Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (BCCG) describing the achievements, progress and challenges of the Looked After Children (LAC) health service in meeting the health needs of Central Bedfordshire's children and young people in care and care leavers during the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014. Key developments for 2013/14 were also detailed in the report.

The Chairman advised Members that the author of the report, the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children, was unable to attend the Panel due to illness and so the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations would present highlights of the report on her behalf.

The Assistant Director drew Members' attention to the following issues:

- The large increase in out of county placements and the delays or poor quality experienced by many of the children and young people with their Review Health Assessments due to the level of service provided by the external health providers. In response the BCCG had reviewed the commissioning arrangements for 2014/15
- The working hours of the Designated Nurse had been increased from 0.6 whole time equivalent to full time. Whilst this represented an positive development the Designated Doctor's working hours remained at four hours a week which failed to reflect both the service demand and the need for clinical leadership
- A short questionnaire (the Health Assessment Service User Questionnaire) had been developed by the Designated Nurse for children and young people to complete to provide feedback on service provision
- Mental health support was not as strong as it should be and service provision was being recommissioned
- Partnership development of a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) Pathway which had been finalised in September 2013. Though the Questionnaire had revealed that LAC were mainly happy and settled improvements were still required compared to the Central Bedfordshire's statistical neighbours.

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations concluded by stating that the report was, overall, positive with good working between teams and good communications.

A Member stated that the six monthly Review Health Assessments for LAC failed to meet the required deadlines and she queried whether it would be possible to improve GP's assessment rate to overcome this issue. In response the Head of Corporate Parenting explained that there had been significant improvements in this field to the extent that the Central Bedfordshire stood at 94.7% in 2013/14 in comparison to the statistical neighbour average in 2012/13 of 86.3%. The Chairman requested that the Panel's thanks be formally recorded for this improvement.

The Vice-Chairman referred to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and the time taken to refer LAC with mild to moderate mental health issues to appropriate services. In response the Head of Corporate Parenting acknowledged that difficulties existed with regard to timescales but assured the meeting that alternative provision would be used if necessary. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations added that the Early Intervention Children Looked After Service (EICLAS) was commissioned to provide an early intervention service but a new contract was due to be issued and it was anticipated that the new service provider would provide significant improvements.

Further comments and queries followed.

NOTED

the Looked After Children Annual Health Report for 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.30 a.m. and concluded at 1.00 p.m.)



Appendix A

Children in Care Council



The CiCC & Young Voices

- We currently have around 30 young people involved in the CiCC and participation activities. We are a mixed age range from 16 – 22.
- The Young Voices group is for 8 – 15 year olds. We have around 30 young people who are involved in this group. Young Voices are involved in activity based participation as well as consultation based participation.
- We all have different experiences of being in care and are using these experiences to support the work of the CiCC.
- Our backgrounds are all different, we have young people who live in foster placements, young people who live in residential units, some of us are living independently and some of us living in semi independent housing.



Passport to Independence

We organised the ‘Passport to Independence’ day which looked at the following areas which young people identified as the main areas needed to make a successful transition to independence.

- Education, Training and Employment
- Practical Skills
- Housing Options
- Health Information and Support
- Pathway Plan Process
- Entitlements Information and Support



We held workshops with Councillors, Officers and Young People. The information collected will be used to create the Passport to Independence which young people will work through to evidence they are ready for the transition to independence.

The Key Messages

Young people would like information and support about the options for education & training or employment that are available to them so that informed decisions can be made.

Young people want pathway plans that are easy to read, colourful and set out achievable goals.

Young people want easily accessible information on their entitlements for example how to access files.

Young people want to work with their social worker or personal adviser to find out about the different housing options available.

Young people want to start developing the practical skills for independent living at an early age.



Summer Activities Programme

- The Young Voices group gave their ideas for the summer activities programme from this there were 7 days of activities organised for looked after children age range from 8-15.
- Activities included canoeing, pony days, multi activity day at RAF Henlow, a trip to Gulliver's and a creative workshop.
- 37 young people attended at least one activity.
- Members of the CiCC have also supported Young Voices during the activities and acted as peer mentors.
- An activity day was organised for the over 16's. There were 20 young people who attended this day and participants have requested more days like these.



The Frontline Programme

Frontline is a two year social work training programme for graduates. The programme is made up of a five-week residential and then two years working in a local authority child protection team. The first year qualifies the participants as social worker through direct work. The second year leads to a full Master's qualification whilst working as a newly qualified social worker.

The University of Bedfordshire are part of the Frontline Academy and asked us to deliver some training. We developed a workshop based on 'what makes a good social worker', we used our experiences to give them ideas from young peoples point of view.

10 members of our CiCC attended and worked with the participants to complete the boxes which represent a Social Workers Tool box. This was a real success and we were asked to return to take part in another workshop.

We have brought a sample to show you.



Frontline Feedback

We have received some really positive feedback from Louise Grant from the University of Bedfordshire and would like to share this with you.

The contribution of the young people from Central Bedfordshire to the recent Summer Institute for Frontline participants was exceptional. The thoughtfully constructed exercise and their keenness to offer their expertise to trainee social workers learning was a key part of the education provided.

The young people represented Central Bedfordshire Council's commitment to empowering young people in an exemplary fashion. They were enabled by the workers to run a session for 100 participants who unanimously reported that the learning they obtained from the young people as to what makes a good social worker will shape their future development. What was particularly satisfy to see was how in turn the young people blossomed and hopefully they felt a valued contributor. Hearing the young people confidently speaking to trainee social workers about what they perceived as the key skills and knowledge required for effective social work will have a lasting impact. It is to be hoped that the young people also gained from this experience.

Thank you so much arranging this and I hope we can work together in the future.

CiCC Work

- Members of the CiCC were involved in the ASYE interviews, we organised a group exercise to look at how the candidates interact with young people.
- Members of our CiCC have been part of the Children's Commissioner expert group to develop the new care monitor survey. The CiCC members were also invited to meet with a design team from Nottingham University to help create the online survey.
- Members of the CiCC have been consulted on the design of the new review booklets.
- CiCC members attended the regional participation group where representatives from the Office of the Children's Commissioner attended and from this we have discussed organising a regional CiCC Conference to showcase the Eastern Region's participation work.



Future work



- We have been busy organising the awards evening which will take place on Friday 24th October.
- We will be meeting as a group to discuss the way in which the CiCC plans and develops their work. The will also include how the CiCC meetings are arranged.
- We will continue with the development of passport to independence.
- Review booklet for over 16's.
- We will be attending future meetings with the Eastern Region's CiCC group to continue organising the conference which we hope will take place in May 2015.
- We have been looking at our Pledge and think that this needs to be reviewed. We have been thinking about how to do this and would like your feedback on how we can work with you to do this?

Thank you for listening.

Any Questions?

Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 1 December 2014
Subject: Engagement and Involvement of Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Report of: Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services

Summary: The report set out how Children's Services are responding to the requirements of the Children and Families Act 2014, to include children and young people with SEND in the development of the Local Offer.

Local authorities **must** publish a Local Offer, setting out in one place information about provision they expect to be available across education, health and social care for children and young people in their area in their area who have Special Educational Needs or are disabled.

Contact Officer: Ken Harvey, Head of Service, Children with Disabilities.

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.

Financial:

1. The work has been commissioned and monitored by the Head of Service, Children with Disabilities and funded from core budget. The work is monitored through the Support and Aspiration Board (*Work stream 2 :The Engagement and Involvement of Children and Young People with SEND*)
2. Further funding will be required to continue the development work and a bid will be made to the Support and Aspiration Board, against the SEND transformation grant, to support the children and young people's contribution to the Local Offer and for ensuring that a forum to support development through the SEND reforms is established.

Legal:

3. The Children and Families Act 2014 came in to force on 1st April 2014. Part 3 of the Act sets out the changes for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) which were implemented from 1st September 2014.
4. Section 30 requires local authorities to publish and maintain a local offer. The Local Offer is information that sets out the education, health and social care provision that the local authority expects to be available for disabled children and young people and those with SEN. This specifically includes provision that will help them prepare for adulthood (Section 30(3)).
5. The Local Offer will set out in one place information about provision they expect to be available across education, health and social care for children and young people in their area who have SEN or are disabled, including those who do not have Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans. EHC plans will replace statements of special educational need
6. As well as providing information about services, the Local Offer should be used as a tool to measure how well services are meeting local need and achieving the outcomes set out in the joint commissioning arrangements. Local authorities have a duty to publish comments from children, their parents, and young people on the Local Offer and any actions they intend to take in response (Section 30(6)). These views and comments should be used to inform future commissioning decisions.
7. The Local Offer must be developed by local authorities and their health partners, together with children, their parents and young people.

Risk Management:

8. Not engaging children and young people in the process would result in non compliance with the Act.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

9. There are no immediate staffing issues but workforce development across the SEND services will be essential if the children and young people are to be effectively engaged in the shaping and delivery of services through the Local Offer.

Equalities/Human Rights:

10. These are addressed throughout the SEND reforms.

Community Safety:

11. There are no community safety issues.

Sustainability:

12. The work has been commissioned in response to Section 30(6) of the Children and Families Act 2014. The Council will assist children and young people in establishing a forum which will support the transformation of the SEND reforms to 2017.

RECOMMENDATION:

Corporate Parenting Panel to note the progress made in implementing the 'Engagement and Involvement of Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)'

Background

13. Central Bedfordshire Council have successfully engaged in a coproduction model with parents and carers of children and young people with SEND. The Parent Carer forum, known as the Special Needs Action Panel (SNAP) are fully involved in the SEND reforms. The reforms are the most radical change to services for SEND for over 30 years.
14. The work with children and young people has been less developed to date. Shortland - Palmer Consultancy have been commissioned to begin the work of ensuring that effective and meaningful participation for children and young people with SEND is evident in the SEND reforms.

Commissioned work

15. The Project Overview, Learning, Structures and recommendations are set out in Appendix A.
16. The commissioned work has involved in put from 180 children and young people to date. The work has been undertaken with a range of schools and organisations:
 - The Chiltern School
 - Weatherfield Academy
 - Harlington Upper School
 - Samuel Whitbread Academy
 - Central Bedfordshire College
 - MENCAP
 - Families United Network
 - Outside –iN
17. The work was undertake through a range of methodologies including questionnaires, leadership and self expression workshops, focus groups, home visits, music workshops and depth interviews.
18. An event was held on 28 October 2014 to bring together a group of young people with SEND and begin the work with them of gaining the confidence to share their views and experience of services. Central Bedfordshire Officers attended for part of the meeting to hear the outcomes of their assisted workshop
19. There are some early key messages coming from the work:
 - Children and young people are often not involved in decisions about their lives. They want to be listened to more and would like to be more involved in decisions about their lives
 - All children and young people can communicate, sometimes using sign language, body language or using pictures
 - Children and young people can help adults make a better website to let them know activities they can do and what help they can get.

20. Further detail about the views of children and young people can be found in Appendix B which will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel by Ben Palmer and Sarah Walker with the assistance of young people who have been involved in the project.

Appendices:

Appendix A - Project Overview

Appendix B - The 'Effective and Meaningful' Participation Children and Young People with SEND (slide presentation)

Background Papers:

None

SEND Participation: Project Overview

- The Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice place duties on Local Authorities and health partners to co-produce services with Children and Young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
- Shortland-Palmer Consultancy were commissioned by Central Bedfordshire Councils' Support and Aspiration Board, to co-produce a strategy for the '*effective and meaningful*' participation of children and young people with SEND. Kaizen Partnership facilitated the operational elements of the project.
- The project comprised of 4 phases running from April to October 2014: Research, Development, Evaluation and Validation. The project will need to move into a 5th phase of implementation.
- Key stakeholders from CBC, NHS and VCS were interviewed. Children and Young people participated in activities run in schools, an FE college and charity settings. Over 180 children and young people participated in this project, a small group of parents took part.
- CBC will need to actively evolve and develop participation across all groups engaging with Children and Young People. Further development work is needed to engage with other groups e.g. younger age groups and different ethnic groups.
- Further work is required to fully co-produce a Children and Young People version of The Local Offer.
- The project plan was adapted to accommodate a more young person-centred method of conducting training and setting-up of a steering group.
- For long-term project success commitment from CBC, NHS both financially and organisationally will be required. It is vital that this work is taken forwards and participation recognised as a vital part of day to day working when designing and delivering services.

SEND Participation: Learning

A culture change is required in the way children and young people are involved in decision making. Current structures and approaches to participation, planning services and making decisions about individuals care and support needs are inaccessible to children and young people with disabilities, especially those with special educational support or communication needs.

Children and young people are also not accustomed to being involved in decision making. Children and young people said they want to have a greater say. Currently they do not have information about their options in a format they can understand. They also need support from a trusted and known person to build confidence and enable them to express themselves.

The following Code for Participation has emerged from this consultation process and also amalgamates findings from other national consultation reports:

- Children and young people have a right to be listened to in decisions that are being made that affect them (both individually and collectively)
- Children and young people should have information about services, support and their care delivered in a way that they can understand
- Children and young people should have support from someone that they are comfortable with and trust to help them express their views and opinions
- Children and young people should be given the support and encouragement to practice and develop decision making skills at home, in school and in the community.
- Young leaders should be nurtured and where possible consultation with children and young people should be youth led or delivered in partnership with children and young people.
- Opportunities for children and young people to help shape decision making should be fun, creative and varied - giving children and young people of different ages, abilities and interests an opportunity to express their opinions and take part.

SEND Participation: Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the consultation with children, young people, parents and professionals in Central Bedfordshire. They are also informed by good practice and research developed amongst SEND reform Pathfinders.

The aim is to create a culture change so that all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities are able to have a voice in decisions that are made that affect them individually. They should also have the opportunity to get involved in shaping the services that are provided to them.

Objective 1: Information and communication

Children and young people should have access to, and be supported to understand what help and support they can get at school and home; what activities and clubs are happening and how to join them; who to talk to if they are not happy at school, home or with decisions that their doctor or social worker makes; and that they have a right to be listened to.

Objective 2: Decision making about individual care

Children and young people with SEND are listened to, and involved in, decisions made about their education, health care, the help they get and what activities they get to do in their spare time. Children and young people should be supported and encouraged to start making decisions (however small) about things at home, in school and wider service provision. Parents / carers and other adults that work with them, should help them and accept that sometimes they will make mistakes.

Objective 3: Co-production and decision making about SEND services

Services for children and young people with SEND get better because children and young people work with the people in charge to think about what is needed and what is the best way to make it happen. Children and young people get their ideas taken seriously.

SEND Legislation & Early Support Principles

Children and Families Act 2014 (S19) Principles: 'Must have regard to...'	Early Support principles
<p>'...the views, wishes and feelings of the child and his or her parent, or the young person.'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Valued Uniqueness: The uniqueness of children, young people and families is valued and provided for ▪ Ordinary Lives: Wherever possible, children, young people and their families are able to live 'ordinary lives'
<p>'...the importance of the child and his or her parent, or the young person, participating as fully as possible in decisions relating to the exercise of the function concerned.'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Planning Partnerships: An integrated assessment, planning and review process is provided in partnership with children, young people and families ▪ Participation: Children, young people and families are involved in shaping, developing and evaluating the services they use
<p>'...the importance of the child and his or her parent, or the young person, being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions.'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Informed Choices: Children, young people and families are able to make informed choices ▪ Workforce Development: Children, young people and families can be confident the people working with them have appropriate training, skills, knowledge and experience
<p>'...the need to support the child and his or her parent, or the young person, in order to facilitate the development of the child or young person and to help him or her achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes.'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning & Development: Children and young people's learning and development is monitored and promoted ▪ Key Working: Service delivery is holistic, co-ordinated, seamless and supported by key working ▪ Working Together: Multi-agency working practices and systems are integrated ▪ Birth to Adulthood: Continuity of care is maintained through different stages of a child's life and through preparation for adulthood

SEND Participation: Structures

The structures that are recommended for the participation of children and young people with SEND in strategic decision making are different from the existing

Youth Parliament and indeed some of the other structures found in Pathfinders across the country. The proposed model is based on trying to be:

- A flexible and strong mechanism that allowed large numbers of children and young people to get involved in a way that suits them.
- something that could both work on timescales that suits children and young people as well as be able to respond to the fast paced decision making that sometimes takes place in councils
- built on the great commitment that has been shown by schools and voluntary sector to supporting this agenda through the consultation phase (and that in turn supported a culture of listening within the school community)
- a model that was able to reach children and young people in an environment where they felt comfortable and had support to help them express themselves
- flexible to using different methods for different children and young people to express themselves
- a model that developed and promoted children and young people with disabilities as young leaders, providing an important leadership function but also inspiring their peers
- where young people are providing an irreplaceable function (because of their skills / abilities and experiences) recognising this through the creation of some formal paid positions to support the outreach and planning team.

With all of this in mind and inspired by the young people who have taken part so far and initiated their own consultations with their peers through school assemblies we are proposing a central group of children and young people who would act as a 'Planning and outreach team'. They would provide their own views and feedback on some issues but primarily they would aim to facilitate consultation with their peers within their schools or youth groups. In these settings children and young people could explore what issues they most want to change through drama, art or discussion and the planning and outreach team would feed this back into council decision making structures, using a variety of formats.

Process

Central Bedfordshire Council engage with young people who have additional needs to have their say

Numbers and methodologies

Over
180
children and young people were consulted

Mix of methodologies:

-  Questionnaires
-  Focus groups
-  Depth interviews
-  Leadership and self expression workshops
-  Home visits
-  Music workshops

Organisations we worked in partnership with to deliver this are:

							
The Chiltern School	Weatherfield Academy	Harlington Upper School	Samuel Whitbread Academy	Central Bedfordshire College	MENCAP	Families United Network	Outside-iN

What did people tell us?

Children and young people are often **not involved** in decisions about their lives.



Children and young people want to be listened to more and would like to **be more involved** in decisions about their lives.



All children and young people can communicate, sometimes using sign-language, body-language or using pictures.



Many children and young people like to go on the computer, using a computer can be a good way to **tell people what you think**.



Ideas about how we can make it better

Children and young people can help adults make a **website and better leaflets**, to let them know activities they can do and what help they can get.



Train parents, carers and adults to learn to support children and young people with disabilities get involved in decision making.



Children and young people get **more chances to make decisions** about their lives.



Children and young people can **be young leaders** to help Central Bedfordshire Council collect ideas and decide what services the council should focus on.



The '*Effective and Meaningful*' Participation of Children and Young People with SEND

Shortland Palmer Consultancy

Special Educational Needs & Disability Reforms

The Government has reformed the legislation for Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) within the **Children and Families Act**, the **Code of Practice** and supporting **Regulations**.

These outline responsibilities for local authorities and health services to actively engage children and young people and their families in both the reforms, and in the culture change required to embed participation in ongoing developments.

‘The Act places the views, wishes and aspirations of children, parents and young people at the heart of the system and requires a culture change in the ways in which professionals work with families and with each other.’

Edward Timpson, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children & Families

Project Objectives

- To review the SEND Pathfinder sites, examples of good practice and the requirements for participation within legislation.
- To identify and engage with stakeholders from education, health, social care, leisure and the voluntary and community sector (VCS).
- To facilitate the operational participation for the co-production of the Local Offer by children and young people with SEND.

Project Objectives (Continued)

- To co-produce a strategy for the ‘effective and meaningful’ participation of children and young people with SEND.
- To provide recommendations for the sustainable participation of children and young people with SEND.
- To provide a final project report including project process, research, strategy, recommendations and proposed structure to support the work going forwards.

Project Process and Key Learning

Phases ran from April to October, with implementation to follow.

Stakeholders were interviewed from Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC), Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (BCCG) and the VCS.

Over 180 Children and Young people participated with the project.

Engaging with Young People in a familiar environment with people who knew them well proved to be highly successful.

Information on the population of Children and Young People with SEND is key.



Project Process and Key Learning (Continued)

CBC needs to actively evolve and develop participation.

Further development work is required to fully co-produce 'The Local Offer'.

Organisational commitment is needed to assure long-term sustainability.

A cultural shift is required to ensure that services are developed and designed with the involvement of young people with SEND.

Research: What Did We Learn?

REM MOVEMENTS
OR BODY
MOVEMENTS
THAT ARE
ACHIEVABLE

Culture change is required in the way children and young people are involved in decision making.

Children and young people are not accustomed to being involved in decision making.

BODY
LANGUAGE
WIGGING
FACIAL EXPRESSION
SQUIRMING

Code for Participation

- They have a right to be listened to in decisions that are being made that affect them.
- They should have information about services, support and their care in a way that they can understand.
- They should have support from someone who knows them well to help to express their views.



Code for Participation (Continued)

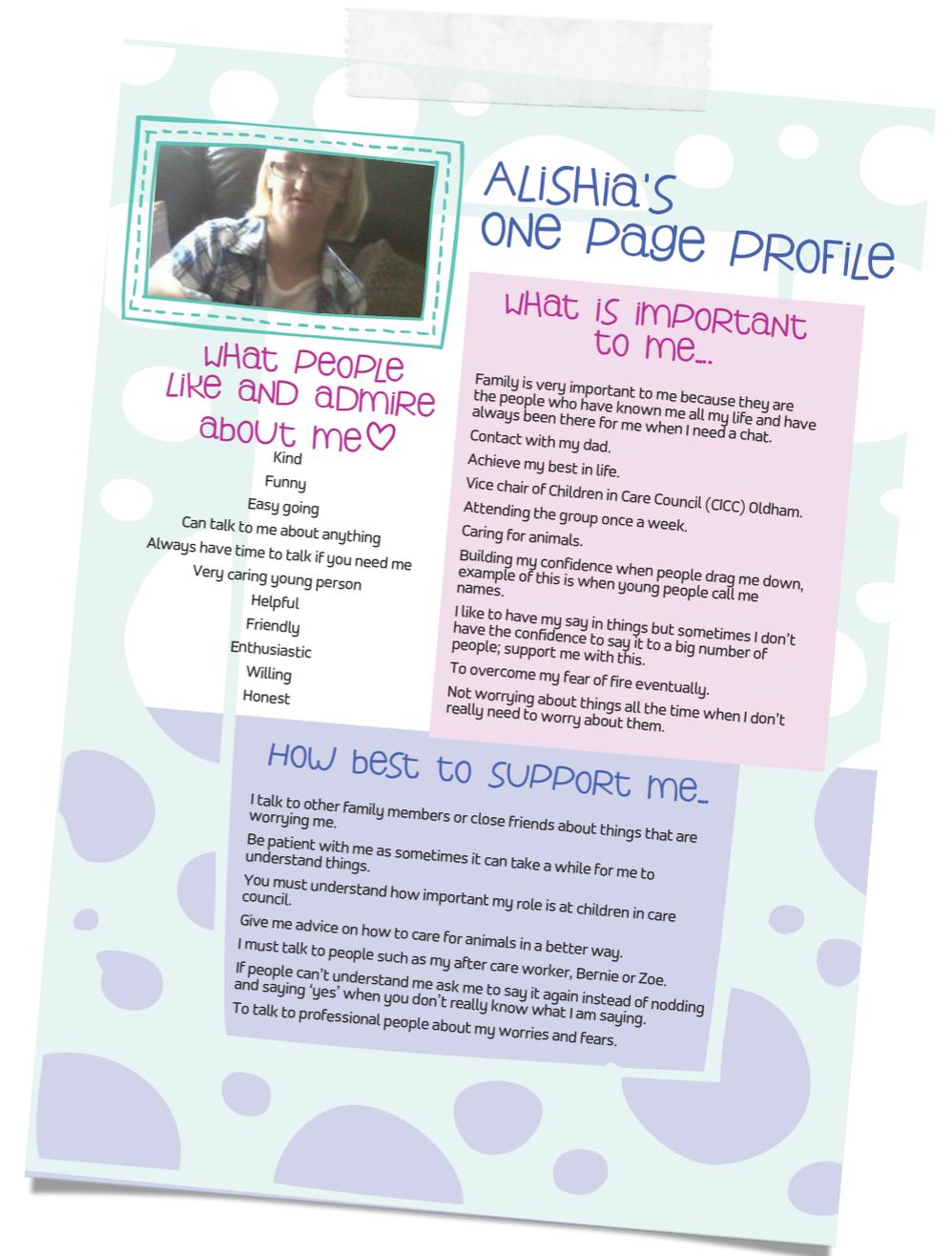


- They should be given the support and encouragement to practice and develop decision making skills.
- Young leaders should be nurtured and where possible consultation should be youth-led.
- Opportunities for children and young people to shape decision making should be fun, creative and varied.

Strategy and Recommendations

The focus is on building the capacity, confidence and skills of young people, parents & carers, and professionals to engage children and young people in decision making through sharing or resources and training.

Tools such as the 'About me' one page summary, or Mind of My Own (MOMO) app to help young people have a say in their Education, Health and Care plans or other assessments of need.



Strategy and Recommendations (Continued)

Allowing young people to decide who they bring into support them express themselves is important; this could be a friend or sibling, it doesn't have to be a parent.

Building on the success of engaging young people through the schools we are recommending a youth led outreach model of consultation and co-production.

A core group of young people would meet regularly consulting with their peers at school termly, using mixed methods to allow all abilities and interests to take part.

Strategy Objectives



Objective 1: Information and Communication.

Objective 2: Decision making about individual care.

Objective 3: Co-production and decision making about SEND services.

Achieving the Objectives...

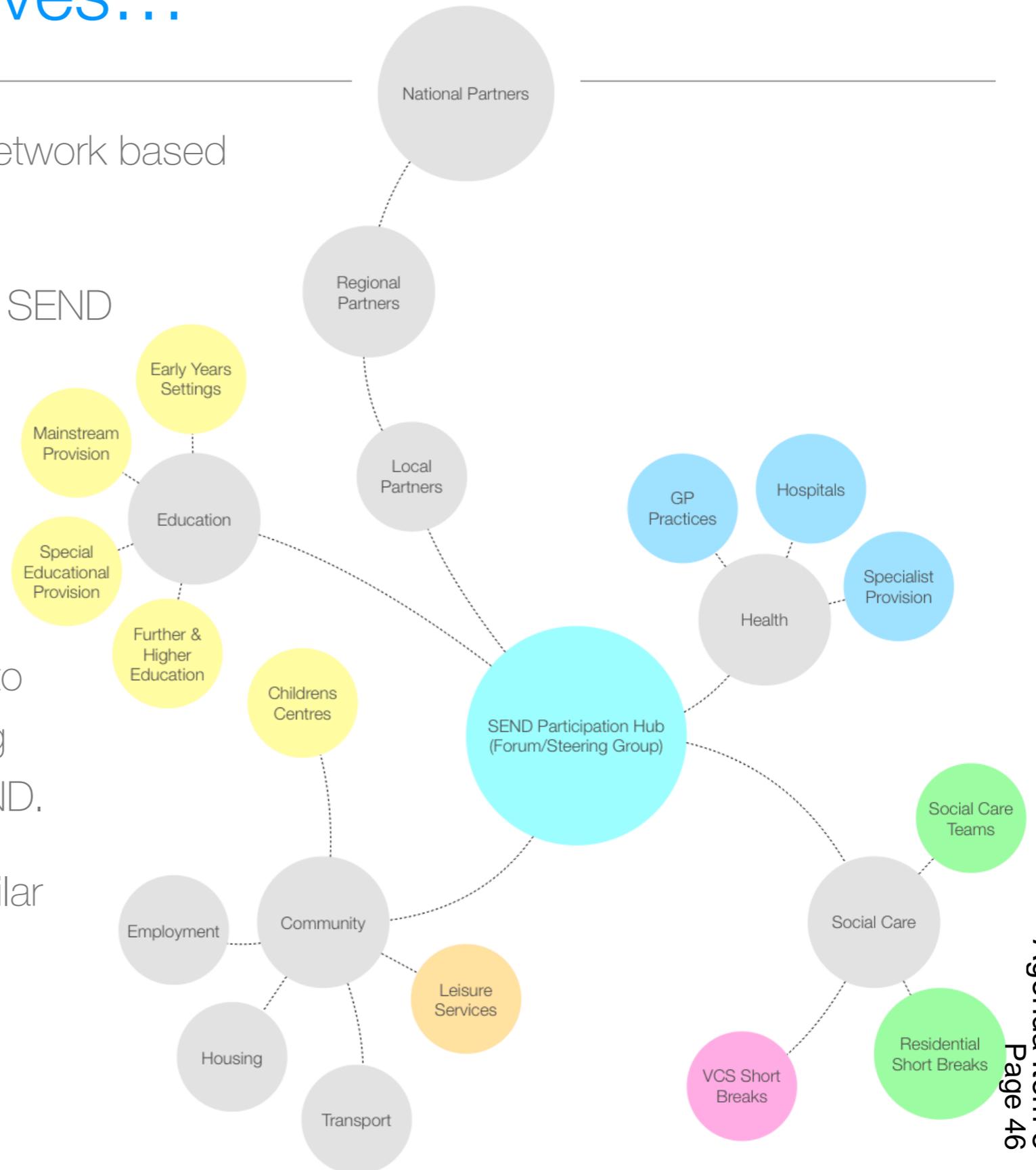
Establishing a SEND Participation Network based on a hub and spoke model.

ALL children and young people with SEND have a one page 'About me' profile.

Training workshops developed for professionals, parents and carers.

A Participation Charter to promote awareness and encourage sign-up to the vision and values of empowering children and young people with SEND.

Use of Mind of My Own app, or similar to support self advocacy in decision making.



‘Fundamental to making this work and managing expectations on all sides is open and honest dialogue with parents, children and young people.’

Dan Poulter, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health

Questions?



Out of County Residential placements

Corporate Parenting Panel 1 December 14

Introduction



- The Council needs to provide a variety of residential care packages to meet the individual needs of looked after children.
- The Council has a shared contract with Bedford Borough Council for 'in-house' residential care managed by The St Christopher's Fellowship. This contract is for the management of two residential homes, providing 13 places
- Residential homes often need to include access to additional care and health services.
- Some children taken into care need to be provided with accommodation away from their home location for their own safety.

Residential placements



- To fulfil our role as corporate parents, we need to find the most appropriate homes for looked after children
- Children who need to move to residential homes are our most vulnerable and often have the most complex needs.
- The Council has to meet OFSTED/statutory requirements including:
 - to monitor the quality and suitability of residential placements
 - to manage risk at any placement and around the child
 - ensure the safety of any child placed in care
- OFSTED National Minimum Standards for Children in Care 2011 -
“Children in residential care should be given the opportunity for as full an experience of a supportive homely environment as possible”

Making a placement



If it is the most appropriate option for the child and after careful consideration and judgement, we will source an residential placement.

The next steps are:

- To consider the holistic needs of the child first
- Determine who could meet these needs (decisions are made by team including social workers, commissioners and provider information).
- Contact potential providers to assess suitability of the home (location, mix of children, and potential risk elements)
- Any appropriate home who have availability, then consider the latest OFSTED inspections grades, Reg. 33 and 34 reports, statement of purpose, cost, location and staffing (qualifications, training, vetting)

How – monitoring placements



- Once in placement, the Council receives a monthly report from the provider re every child's placement and progress
- The Council also ask for additional information to provide additional quality assurance (see next slide for more information)
- Social workers carry out regular and regulatory visits
- IRO's complete 6 monthly reviews for all Looked after Children, and in most cases will meet with staff from the residential home provider
- Commissioners receive Regulation 34 reports from providers every quarter
- Commissioners receive Regulation 33 reports from independent inspectors every month
- Commissioners complete annual quality assurance checks/compliance

Additional monitoring



Commissioners also collect and monitor the following information on a monthly basis and present to senior managers:

Dashboard monitoring sheet

- Placement stability
- Health and wellbeing of the young person
- Safety and Risky Behaviours, including episodes of children absconding and/or any potential CSE risk
- Participation (extra-curricular activities, preparation for independence etc.)
- Educational Outcomes

Additional quality assurance



- The Council has recently commissioned an independent Quality Assurance and Compliance Manager. She will:
 - make visits to every residential home where we have children placed. This will be a risk based approach.
 - Take on a ‘mini-inspection’ of the home, talking to staff, and children.
 - Experience of the child will be central to the visits
 - Take a ‘critical friend’ approach with the residential homes, enabling them to have open and honest discussions
 - Report back to Central Bedfordshire Senior management and the homes on findings and any recommendations for improvements.



Any questions?

Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date: 1 December 2014

Subject: Interim Report of the Virtual School for Looked After Children

Report of: Sue Harrison, Director of Children’s Services

Summary: This report provides information on the role of the Virtual School and the indicative outcomes for Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire in the Academic Year 2013/14. It also identifies 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, and sets out the next stages of its development.

Advising Officer: Helen Redding, AD School Improvement

Contact Officer: Jackie Edwards, Virtual School Head

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS
<p>Council Priorities:</p> <p>The report supports two of the priorities in Central Bedfordshire's Strategic Plan: ‘Improve educational attainment’ and ‘protect the vulnerable’, and also Central Bedfordshire’s Medium Term Plan: Delivering your priorities – Our Plan for Central Bedfordshire 2012-2016 within the specific priority of Improved Educational Attainment.</p> <p>Financial:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Virtual School is fully funded through the Dedicated School Grant (DSG) High Needs Block. <p>Legal:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. The Council has a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children it looks after regardless of where they live. In Central Bedfordshire, this duty is delivered through the work of the Virtual School for Looked After Children in partnership with schools and other services. The Virtual School Head became a statutory post in June 2014. The current Virtual School Head was appointed as permanent from 1 September 2014. Previously she carried out this role as a Consultant.

3. The governing bodies of all maintained schools are required under the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 to appoint a Designated Teacher to promote the educational achievement of Looked After Children (LAC) who are on the school roll.

Risk Management:

4. The Virtual School ensures that it knows which children are looked after and that there is a Personal Education Plan (PEP) in place for each LAC. The Virtual School monitors the attendance and progress of Central Bedfordshire's LAC, in Central Bedfordshire schools and those living and accessing education in other Council areas.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **That the Corporate Parenting Panel considers this report, the progress made to date, and comments on the steps identified to improve outcomes for Looked After Children in the future.**

The Virtual School

5. Councils work in a number of ways to drive improvement in the educational achievements of the children they look after. In Central Bedfordshire this is managed through the work of the Virtual School for LAC.
6. The Virtual School must ensure that each looked after child achieves optimum educational outcomes at each stage of his or her schooling. In order to achieve this the Virtual School:
 - a) ensures that there is a system to regularly track, monitor and challenge the attendance, attainment and progress of LAC;
 - b) ensures that each LAC has a robust and effective personal education plan (PEP);
 - c) works with schools to improve overall attainment of LAC by challenging schools to improve the achievement and progress of individual children through good use of their resources;
 - d) works with social workers to improve attendance, attainment and progress of LAC;
 - e) ensures that LAC who are educated in schools outside of Central Bedfordshire Council receive the right support to achieve the best educational outcomes.
 - f) manages the Pupil Premium funding allocated for LAC including monitoring the effective use and impact of this funding by schools and settings

Background

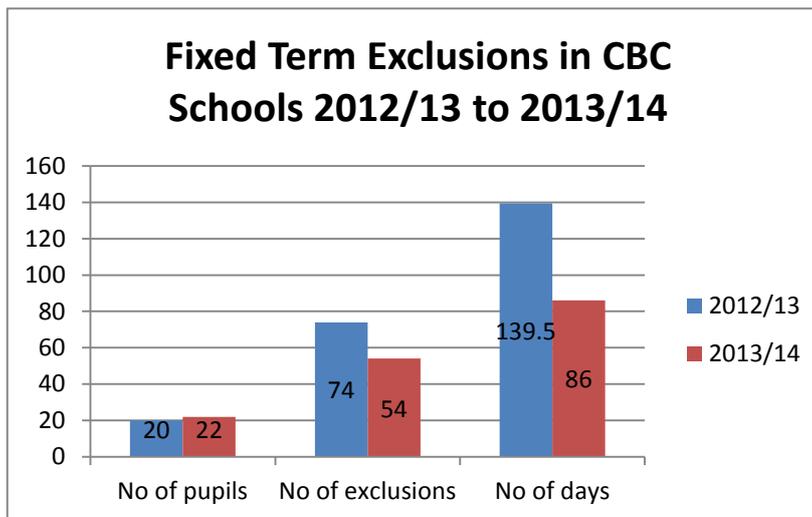
7. In September 2014 a permanent head of the Virtual School was appointed to drive improvement in the attainment of LAC in Central Bedfordshire. This includes working closely with schools and social care services to identify and intervene with those who are at risk of disengagement or under achievement.
8. The Virtual School has pupils on roll who are in the care of Central Bedfordshire Council and who are being educated in Central Bedfordshire schools or in schools in other authorities. In addition, the Virtual School has pupils on its roll who are living within Central Bedfordshire and who attend Central Bedfordshire schools, but who are in the care of other councils. At November 2014 the total number of Central Bedfordshire pupils of statutory school age who are part of the Virtual School is 173 (Reception to Year 11). This does not include 26 Y12 Y13 and Y14 students who attend school/college of which 10 choose to continue with the PEP and are supported by the Virtual School.
9. There is a statutory requirement to monitor the progress of all children who are looked after and to ensure that each LAC has a Personal Education Plan (PEP). The PEP records children's previous educational experiences and attainment as well as setting targets for future achievement. The nominated social worker and the designated teacher are responsible for instigating the writing of the PEP. Completed PEPs are held by the Virtual School. Currently PEPs take place termly where appropriate to enable the Virtual School to closely monitor academic progress. This enables appropriate support and challenge with regard to ensuring pupils are making expected or better than expected progress. There is a quality assurance checklist for all PEPs which helps ensure that they are of a consistently high standard.
10. After consultation with schools and other services it was agreed that the PEP would be revised, and it was piloted in the summer term 2014 and rolled out in September 2014. Initial feedback from schools has been very favourable. The Virtual School Educational Advisers are taking a more proactive role in managing this new documentation to bring about more rigour and consistency to the process.
11. In April 2011 the Government introduced the Pupil Premium. The amount increased in April 2014 to £1900. Through PEP reviews, schools are challenged to identify the impact of Pupil Premium funding on the achievements of LAC. Amendments to the PEP now include a question on how the school uses the Pupil Premium for eligible children to enable the Virtual School to track its use. The impact of the Pupil Premium on the progress and outcomes of LAC is now also a core focus for inspection of schools within the new Ofsted Framework. Advice has been reinforced to schools through a number of means. Currently case studies are being collected on the effective use of the pupil premium on accelerating pupil progress.

12. After consultation with schools and other stakeholders it was agreed that the Virtual School would retain £400 from the £1900 allocated per pupil. The remaining £1500 is given termly to schools to support them in raising educational achievement. There is now a clear application process for schools to request additional funding to support LAC at risk of disengagement or under-achievement. This allows significant additional support to be allocated to those pupils who need it.

Exclusions

13. There were 2 permanent exclusions during 2013/14. One young person returned to her family during the time of the exclusion, and so ceased to be looked after. The other pupil was in a school in a neighbouring Local Authority. Despite the school being willing to withdraw the permanent exclusion this was not supported by that Local Authority's policy on exclusion. The Virtual School worked closely with the social care team, the carer and the identified provision to support the pupil prior to transfer to a new school in September 2014. This second young person who is still LAC is now settled in a mainstream school.
14. Whenever there is the threat of a permanent exclusion the Virtual School will contact the school to explore all the options available including a change of placement. Schools are actively discouraged from permanently excluding LAC, and all other options are explored.
15. There has been 1 permanent exclusion in September 2014 of a pupil for serious behaviours. The pupil is receiving significant support from a range of specialist agencies and received 40 hours of 1:1 tuition funded by the Virtual School until a place was secured for him at the Academy of Central Bedfordshire.

16. In the Academic Year 2013/14 there were a total of 86 days lost as a result of fixed term exclusions of LAC from schools in Central Bedfordshire and this related to 22 different pupils (see chart below). Days lost to fixed term exclusions have reduced significantly in the last academic year (139.5 days in 2012/13 compared to 86 days in 2013/14). There were 72.5 days lost related to 7 pupils in schools outside of Central Bedfordshire in the academic year 2013/14. 2 pupils contributed 49 days to this total one ending up being permanently excluded. Both pupils are now settled in new schools. This is a key priority for this academic year. Fixed terms exclusions continue to be addressed as a priority in this academic year as every day of education lost to fixed term exclusion will impact negatively on outcomes, and can put pressure on a foster placement.

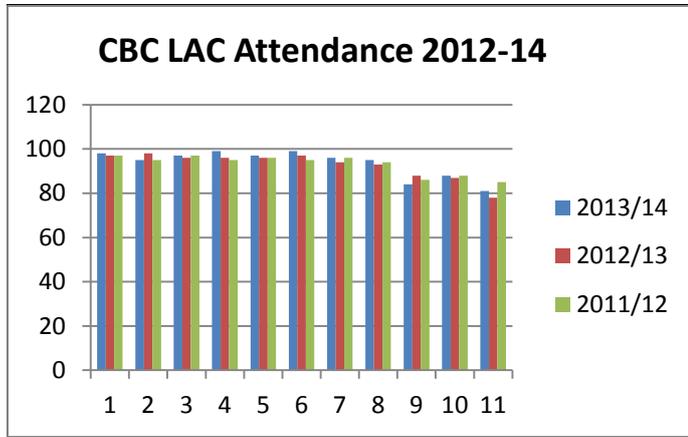


17. The Virtual School is immediately informed by the Inclusion Officer when an exclusion of a LAC occurs. The school are immediately contacted by the Education Adviser to discuss day 1 provision and plan a re-integration meeting to prevent repeat exclusions. 22 pupils had at least one Fixed Term Exclusion, 5 pupils were only excluded once. Exclusions by schools outside of Central Bedfordshire are now being monitored by Welfare Call, enabling the Virtual School to respond as it does with CBC schools.

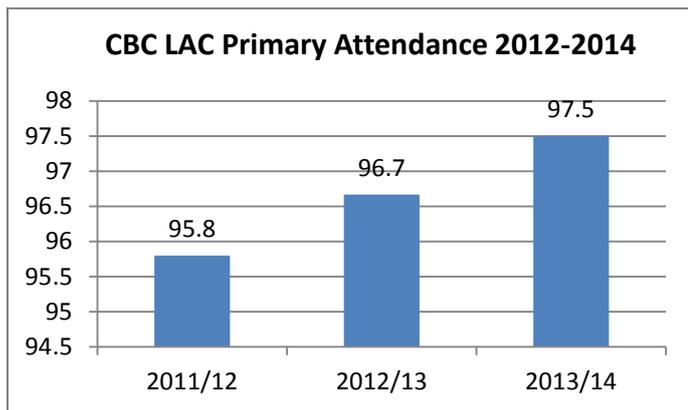
Attendance

18. Welfare Call is now used as an effective way of monitoring and challenging the absence of LAC. Welfare Call contacts all schools where there is a pupil of statutory school age both in and outside of Central Bedfordshire. If a pupil is absent the carer and/or social worker is contacted to ascertain the reason for absence. This system ensures rigorous procedures are in place for safeguarding, as well as accountability for absence from school. The Virtual School and Social Care Managers receive daily updates regarding pupils who have had periods of absence of more than 3 days. This is followed up by the Education Adviser in discussion with the Social Worker. If there is no acceptable reason for absence a multi-professional meeting is called.
19. This system enables the Virtual School to generate attendance data which can be regularly interrogated and shared, and appropriate actions identified immediately to support pupils' improved attendance. As numbers are low in some year groups, this impacts on the percentages.

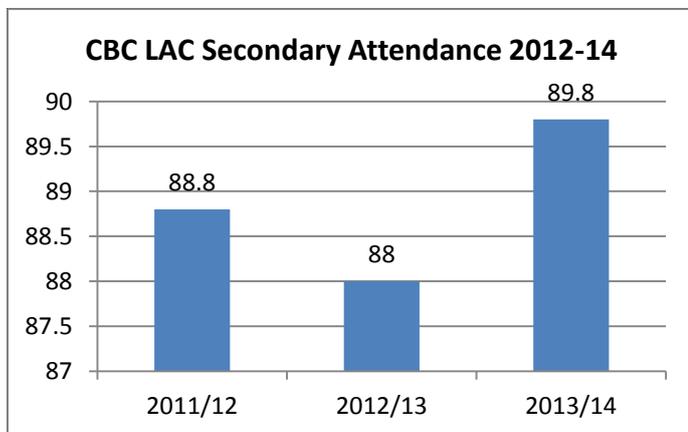
20. This table illustrates the overall attendance data over 3 years. Attendance in Years 9,10, and 11 remains the key challenge and therefore key priority. The Virtual School is working with schools and young people to reengage them in learning. Individual tutors are commissioned where needed to ensure access to learning if a pupil is not attending school.



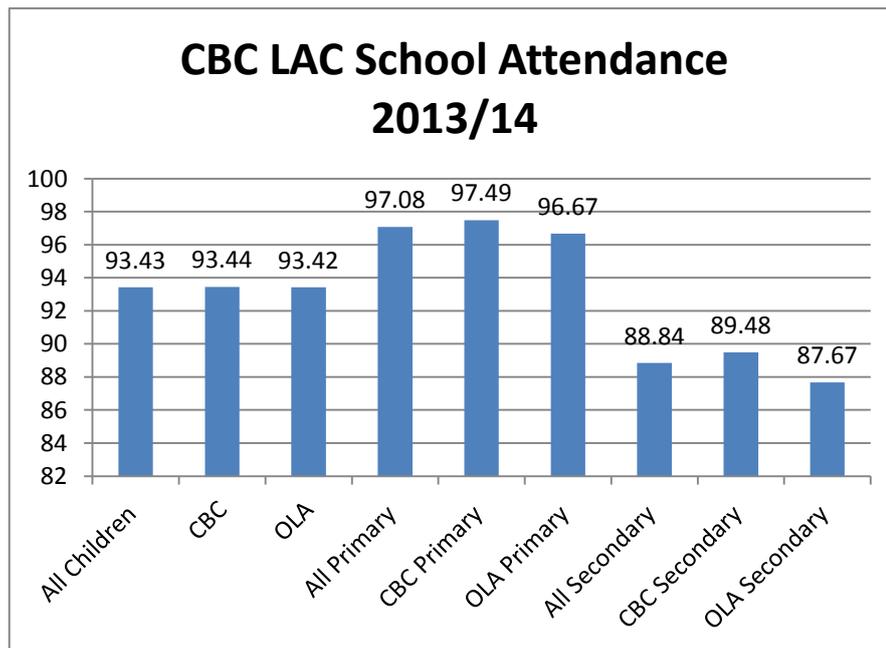
21. This table demonstrates that in the primary year groups overall attendance improved by 0.8%.



22. This table demonstrates that in the secondary year groups, overall attendance has improved by 1.8%.



This table demonstrates that in all phases pupils attending schools in Central Bedfordshire have better attendance



23. Attendance can be low where pupils have moved placement or have spent some time waiting for a school place in other authorities, or where they have had periods on part-time timetables. Currently all pupils where attendance has been identified as a concern are being closely monitored by both the Virtual School and Social Care. If appropriate a part-time timetable may be agreed if it is in the best interest of the child. However it is closely monitored by the Virtual School and only seen as a short term arrangement.
24. Care Planning Guidance and Regulations (2010) suggest that unless it is an emergency, students in Key Stage 4 should not move care placement unless a school placement is available. There were 3 Year 11 pupils moved in academic year 2013/14. This was as a result of either an irretrievable placement breakdown or concerns about the young person's safety. The Virtual School worked closely with social care to minimise the disruption to the young person's learning for example paying for 1 to 1 tuition for a student who moved out of the area, allowing them to sit her English and maths GCSE.
25. The Virtual School works in partnership with social care colleagues to commission care placements which can maintain school placements whenever possible.

Pupils' Achievement

26. Progress and achievement data is collected using the PEP process on a termly basis. The Virtual School now analyses the data and works with schools to identify appropriate next steps.

Key Stage 1 Provisional Results 2013/14

27. The national data for the children looked after continuously for 12 months during the year ending 31 March 2013 shows that the percentage of looked after children achieving the expected level (level 2 or above) in 2013 was 69% in reading, 61% in writing and 71% in mathematics. For reading and writing, this represents an increase on the figures for 2012. For mathematics, the figure remained the same in 2012 and 2013.

28. Key Stage 1 (end of year 2)

The following data is for academic year 2013/14 which cannot be directly compared with the national data above, which is for the academic year 2012/13 and for pupils who have been looked after for more than 12 months. This data is for all pupils looked after by Central Bedfordshire, not only those who have been LAC for over 12 months. One pupil was educated in Wales and comparative data is not available.

- a. Data on 15 pupils is currently being confirmed.
- b. 4 (27%) of these pupils have a statement of SEND.
- c. 7 pupils were educated in Central Bedfordshire schools, 8 pupils in other Local Authorities.
- d. Of these 15 pupils, 10 pupils (66%) achieved the expected level (level 2 or above) in reading, 8 pupils (53%) in writing and 12 pupils (80%) in mathematics.
- e. Of the 7 pupils educated in Central Bedfordshire, 4 pupils (57%) achieved the expected level (level 2 or above) in reading, 4 pupils (57%) in writing, and 6 pupils (85%) in mathematics.
- f. 1 pupil with a statement of SEND made age expected progress achieving level 2 in reading, writing and mathematics.
- g. Of the 8 pupils educated outside of Central Bedfordshire, 6 pupils (75%) achieved level 2 in reading, 4 pupils (50%) in writing and 6 pupils (75%) in mathematics.

Key Stage 2 Provisional Results 2014

29. The national data for the children looked after continuously for 12 months during the year ending 31 March 2013 shows that the percentage of looked after children achieving the expected level (level 4 or above) in 2013 was 63% in reading, 55% in writing and 69% in mathematics. For reading and writing, this represents an increase on the figures for 2012. For mathematics, the figure remained the same in 2012 and 2013.

30. The following data is for academic year 2013/14 which cannot be directly compared with the national data above, which is for the academic year 2012/13 and for pupils who have been looked after for more than 12 months. This data is for all pupils LAC by Central Bedfordshire Council not only those who have been LAC for over 12 months
- a. Data on 8 pupils is currently being confirmed.
 - b. 3 pupils (37.5%) have a statement of special educational need. 1 pupil is currently at school action plus.
 - c. 5 pupils are educated in Central Bedfordshire schools, 3 pupils in other LAs.
 - d. Of the 8 pupils, 5 pupils (63%) achieved level 4 or above in reading, 4 pupils (50%) in writing and 5 pupils (63%) in mathematics.
 - e. Of the 5 pupils educated in Central Bedfordshire schools (3 of whom had identified SEND) 2 pupils (40%) achieved at least level 4 in reading, writing and mathematics.
 - f. Of the 3 pupils educated in schools outside of Central Bedfordshire, 3 pupils (100%) achieved level 4 in reading, 2 pupils (66%) in writing and 3 pupils (100%) in mathematics.
 - g. All pupils made expected progress from KS1, and of the 4 pupils without an identified SEND 100% achieved at least level 4 in reading, writing and mathematics

Key Stage 4 Provisional Results 2014

31. The national data for the children looked after continuously for 12 months during the year ending 31 March 2013 shows that the percentage of looked after children achieving 5+ A* - C including English and mathematics in 2013 was 61%, achieving 5+ A* - C or equivalent in English and mathematics was 15.3% and 5+ A* - C or equivalent was 36.6%.
32. The following data is for academic year 2013/14 which cannot be directly compared with the national data above, which is for the academic year 2012/13 and for pupils who have been looked after for more than 12 months. This data is for all pupils looked after by Central Bedfordshire Council, not only those who have been LAC for over 12 months.

- a. Data on 16 students (two of whom ceased to be LAC in the last 6 months) is currently being confirmed.
- b. 1 student (6%) achieved 5 A* - C including English & mathematics
- c. 4 students (25%) achieved 5 A* - C GCSEs
- d. 11 students (68%) achieved 5 A* - G at GCSEs.
- e. 13 students (81%) were entered for GCSE examinations
- f. 3 students with identified SEN have achieved a range of nationally accredited vocational qualifications including GCSEs and Functional English and mathematics.
- g. 12 students were educated in Central Bedfordshire, the remaining 4 in schools/settings outside of Central Bedfordshire.
- h. Of the 9 students educated in CBC schools settings
 - 3 students (33%) achieved 5+ A* - C GCSEs or equivalent
 - 2 students (22%) achieved 5A* - C at GCSE.
 - 8 students (89%) achieved the equivalent to 5A* - G at GCSE.
- i. Of the 7 students educated outside of Central Bedfordshire
 - 1 student (25%) achieved 5 A* - C including English & mathematics
 - 2 students (29%) achieved 5A* - C at GCSE.
 - 3 students (43%) achieved the equivalent to 5A* - C at GCSE.
 - 3 students (43%) achieved the equivalent to 5A* - G at GCSE.

33. Pupils not entered for GCSE.

3 students were not entered for any GCSEs. 1 was a school refuser; the other 2 had significant issues that led to placement breakdowns and disengagement from learning. All 3 continue to be supported by social care and the Youth Support Service.

Governance

34. The Governing Body is now well established and has met on three occasions. It continues to be well attended and offer appropriate challenge. The current chair will remain in post for this academic year 2014/2015.

Priority Actions for 2014/15

35. In order to improve the outcomes for LAC the priorities of the Virtual School have been jointly identified with the Head of Service for Looked After Children and set out within a Virtual School Improvement Plan which has been agreed with the Governing Body and the Practice Development Board, and will focus on:

- a Ensuring that LAC attend school well, in line with their peers. This will be achieved through:
- The systematic monitoring of attendance data provided by Welfare Call for each pupil, with actions identified to support improved attendance.
 - Follow up any periods of absence from school including multi-professional meetings if the child/young person is at risk of disengagement,
 - Providing schools (both in and out of the Local Authority) with clear guidance on alternatives to fixed term exclusions and part time timetables, and evaluating the impact of that including effective 1:1 tuition.
 - Offering the opportunity for schools to apply for additional funding when a child/young person is at risk of underachieving or disengagement from learning.
 - Supporting all key transition points in the child's education.
- b Ensuring that LAC are placed promptly in schools when moving council areas.
- Virtual School Head is invited to monthly placement stability meetings
 - Social Workers seek advice from the Virtual School prior to a child/young person moving placement that results in a school move.
 - The Virtual School liaises with other Local Authorities to ensure that the child/young person accesses appropriate educational provision in a timely manner
 - The Virtual School works closely with social care and the Assessment & Monitoring Team (SEND) when a child with a statement
- c Strengthening the school's abilities to meet the needs of LAC. This will be achieved through:
- The challenge provided by Virtual School staff at termly PEP reviews;
 - The challenge provided through the Virtual School Head teacher and the Governing Body
 - Analysis of the impact of schools use of Pupil Premium
 - Targeted CPD and annual training which focuses upon maximising pupils' achievements.
 - Greater links with the Teaching School to identify tutors and to develop a website

- d Further improving the quality of PEPs by
- New PEP documentation now being used. Section B (a rolling document) is completed by the school and Section A by the social worker.
 - Quality assuring all PEPs (Virtual School staff);
 - Sharing good practice through subsequent PEP reviews, CBTSP good practice website and annual training.
- e Ensuring that schools intervene promptly and effectively if a LAC falls behind their target trajectory by:
- Challenging the designated teacher regarding use of Pupil Premium and other funding to ensure that each pupil is keeping up with or exceeding their expected level of progress;
 - Keeping a Virtual School database that monitors each looked after child's progress and ensures intervention if a child is falling behind their expected rate of progress.
- f Ensuring robust monitoring and tracking of all 16-21 (or 25) year old young people, and making sure they access further education, training and employment and are in suitable accommodation by contributing to the Support for Success Panel.
- Developing greater links with Youth Support to have more rigorous tracking of post-16 students.
 - Monthly meetings to discuss Y11 and Y12 students and identify appropriate intervention for including accessing additional funding.
- g Embedding the role of the governing body, providing appropriate levels of challenge and support.
- Three Governing Body meetings have been held and attendance is very good with representation from a range of stakeholders including schools and carers
 - Virtual School Head meets termly with the Chair of the Governing Body to discuss the development plan.

Appendices:

Appendix A - Virtual School Development Plan

Background Papers:

None

**CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE VIRTUAL SCHOOL (VS)
DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2013 - 2015**

Overall Aim:

Through shared responsibility, accountability and effective communication among services LAC make expected progress both in their academic achievement and personal development

Objectives	Strategies	Lead Person	By when?	Outcomes	Update January 2015
<p>1 Ensuring that Looked After Children attend school well, in line with their peers. This will be achieved through:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The systematic monitoring of attendance data provided by Welfare Call for each pupil, with actions identified to support improved attendance. ii. Follow up any periods of absence from school including multi-professional meetings if the child/young person is at risk of disengagement, iii. Providing schools with clear guidance on alternatives to fixed term exclusions and part time timetables, and evaluating the impact of that including effective 1:1 tuition. iv. Monitoring exclusions for pupils placed OLA. v. Offering the opportunity for schools to apply for additional funding when a child/young person is at risk of underachieving or disengagement from learning. vi. Supporting all key transition points in the child's education vii. Schools and the VS identify a database of quality assured 	<p>JE/EW LAC Team Schools and settings</p>	<p>July 2015</p>	<p>Improve the overall attendance of years 9, 10 and 11 by 5%</p> <p>Close the gap between secondary attendance and the national average for all schools by 2%</p> <p>Sustain the improvement in primary attendance above the national average for all primary schools to at least 1.5%</p> <p>Days lost to FTE reduce by 20% both in and out of LA.</p> <p>Permanent exclusions occur only in exceptional circumstances. VSH works with any school considering a PE.</p>	

**CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE VIRTUAL SCHOOL (VS)
DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2013 - 2015**

	personal tutors for one to one tuition				
2 Ensuring that Looked After Children are placed promptly in schools when moving council areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Virtual School Head is invited to monthly placement stability meetings ii. Social Workers seek advice from the Virtual School prior to a child/young person moving placement that results in a school move. iii. The Virtual School liaises with other LAs to ensure that the child/young person accesses appropriate educational provision in a timely manner iv. The Virtual School works closely with social care and the Assessment & Monitoring Team (SEND) when a child with a statement requires a new school v. Transition PEP meetings take place where appropriate. 	Schools/ Settings	March 2014	<p>All new school placements are in good or better schools as judged by Ofsted.</p> <p>LAC placed in 85% schools judged good or better by July 2015</p> <p>No child/young person who is required to move school is out of education for more than ten days. (this includes children/young people who are moved to potential adoptive parents)</p> <p>Any child with a statement/EHCP who requires a place in a special school OLA is allocated a place within six weeks of application.</p>	
3 Strengthening the school's abilities to meet the needs of Looked After Children. This will be achieved through:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The challenge provided by Virtual School staff at termly PEP reviews; ii. The challenge provided through the Virtual School Head teacher and the Governing Body iii. Analysis of the impact of schools 	JE/PJ/ LAC team	January 2014	<p>Schools can clearly evidence to effective use of Pupil Premium linked to improved educational outcomes.</p> <p>Schools/settings have access to qualified 1:1 tutors/</p>	

**CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE VIRTUAL SCHOOL (VS)
DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2013 - 2015**

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> iv. use of Pupil Premium Targeted CPD and annual training which focuses upon maximising pupils' achievements. v. Greater links with the Teaching School to identify tutors and to develop a website 			<p>Virtual School has a record of preferred 1:1 tutors.</p> <p>Website developed in partnership with the Teaching School by April 2015</p>	
4 Further improving the quality of PEPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Quality assuring all PEPs (Virtual School staff); ii. Sharing good practice through subsequent PEP reviews, CBTSP good practice website and annual training. iii. Opportunities for Designated Teachers to network through the website. 	<p>JE/EW</p> <p>LAC Team</p>	July 2015	<p>New Section B rolling PEP established.</p> <p>PEP documentation returned in agreed time scales.</p> <p>Quality Assurance process established</p> <p>Three case studies produced by December 2014</p>	
5. Ensuring that schools intervene promptly and effectively if a Looked After Child falls behind their target trajectory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Challenging the designated teacher regarding use of Pupil Premium and other funding to ensure that each pupil is keeping up with or exceeding their expected level of progress; ii. Keeping a Virtual School database that monitors each looked after child's progress and ensures intervention if a child is falling behind their expected rate of progress 		July 2015	<p>Educational outcomes continue to improve.</p> <p>All KS1 & KS2 pupils make at least expected progress from baseline and u in line with national averages for LAC.</p> <p>All Y11s are entered for accredited qualifications in English & mathematics.</p>	

**CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE VIRTUAL SCHOOL (VS)
DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2013 - 2015**

				20% Y11s achieve 5A* - C including English and mathematics. 70% Y11s achieve the equivalent 5A* - G at GCSE.	
6. Ensuring robust monitoring and tracking of all 16-21 (or 25) year old young people, and making sure they access further education, training and employment and are in suitable accommodation by contributing to the Support for Success Panel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Developing greater links with Youth Support to have more rigorous tracking of post-16 students. ii. Monthly meetings to discuss Y11 and Y12 students and identify appropriate intervention for including accessing additional funding. 		July 2015	80% current Y12s who are LAC remain in education, training or employment.	
7 Embedding the role of the governing body, providing appropriate levels of challenge and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Governing Body meetings continue to be held termly and are well attended ii. Virtual School Head meets termly with the Chair of the Governing Body to discuss the development plan. 	JE/EW/K Mc	Ongoing	The work of the VS is robustly monitored by the Governing Body has evidenced by the minutes of meetings	
8 Effective opportunities for Designated Teachers to share effective practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Termly meetings established for staff in schools and settings to share effective practice. ii. Opportunities for experienced DTS to mentor new DTs iii. Expectations are shared with 	LAC Team(Education and Social Care)	Ongoing	Staff in schools and settings have the opportunity to share effective practice and are updated on national expectations.	Network meetings now established with 90% schools with CBC LAC sending representatives.

**CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE VIRTUAL SCHOOL (VS)
DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2013 - 2015**

	<p>schools and setting regarding the tracking of pupil progress and reporting through the PEP</p>		<p>A programme of network and training opportunities is advertised.</p> <p>Evaluations of meetings indicate that 100% view them as us good or better</p> <p>Pupil progress is tracked (see 3 above)</p>	
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Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date: 1 December 2014

Subject: Quarter Two Report on the Fostering Service

Report of: Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services

Summary: The report outlines the activities in the Fostering Service during the second quarter (July-September 2014) of the financial year 2014-2015.

Advising Officer: Gerard Jones, Assistant Director Operations

Contact Officer: Annie Craig, Practice Manager, Fostering

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities

Central Bedfordshire Council's medium term plan priority C Promote Health and Wellbeing.

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 financial year 2014/2015 Adoption and Fostering Service 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 outcome of the Services, in order that they can satisfy themselves that the Services are effective and achieving good outcome for children.

Risk Management

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

Staffing

4. Currently there are 14.3 FTE Social Workers with the Service, 1.5 FTE Social Work Assistant, 1 FTE Marketing Recruitment Officer and 1 FTE Training Co-ordinator supporting the Service in relation to recruitment, training and placements, 2 FTE Administrators also support the two Fostering Teams.
5. The Fostering Service comes under the umbrella of the Corporate Parenting Service. The management of the Fostering Service has recently been amended, with the Fostering Manager being appointed as the Practice Manager and the 2 Deputy Managers being appointed into Manager roles.

Equality/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 notes the content of the report.**

Background

10. The Children Act 2004, Care Standards Act 2000 and associated relevant Regulations and National Minimum Standards require the Local Authority Fostering Service to report to Members at three monthly intervals. This will be achieved by presentation of quarterly reports.

This is the second quarter report for the financial year 2014/2015.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

11. During July, August and September a variety of recruitment activities/events took place in line with the Fostering Service recruitment strategy.
12. Outreach events included attendance at Wootton Family Fun Day; Church End Lower School Fete, Marston Moretaine; Party in the Park, Dunstable; ASDA, Dunstable; Pride in Stotfold Day; a classic car show in Houghton Regis and an information evening was held in Bedford for prospective foster carers.
13. Various leaflet drops took place in Luton, Maulden, Westoning, Stotfold, Silsoe, Barton-le-Clay and Houghton Regis. Leaflets were also put in goodie bags at a foster carers fundraising event and at another fundraising event held by Keech Hospice.
14. Leaflet and poster packs were sent to six new Churches for display purposes. Leaflets and poster packs were also sent to South Beds Circuit Administrator for distribution to Tesco and Sainsbury's in Dunstable and have been placed in all the local libraries around the County. The Fostering Team have also entered into a two year sponsorship deal with Eaton Bray's Lions Football Team.
15. In relation to on-line recruitment there have been ongoing posts on Facebook promoting the fees scheme, the celebration of Fostering Event held in September and advertising forthcoming information evenings.
16. With regard to press activity, advertisements were placement in Bedford Times and Citizen, Biggleswade Chronicle, Bedford on Sunday and Leighton Buzzard Observer. A write up of the celebration of fostering event was also included in Bedfordshire of Sunday.
17. Separate interviews took place with a foster carer and with the Fostering Manager and the write up of these interviews were placed in the Staff Central magazine.
18. As a result of the recruitment drive during their period we received a total of 47 enquiries about fostering. There were 19 in July, 4 in August and 24 in September. There were 20 initial visits allocated during this period, 8 for July, 8 for August and 4 for September. There were 11 application forms received during this period, 2 for July, 6 for August and 3 for September.

Assessments

19. As of the 30 September 2014 there were 30 assessments in progress; 15 of these were for mainstream fostering, 6 were temporary assessments of Family and Friends carers (Reg. 24), 4 were full Family and Friends assessments, 2 were Private Fostering assessments and 3 were Special Guardianship Orders assessments.

20. During this quarter 5 families were approved to foster, 4 were to provide mainstream short term and respite care and 1 family were approved as Family and Friends carers.
21. As of the 30 September 2014 the Service had 92 fostering households (compared to 93 in April). 67 of these carers were mainstream (compared to 68 in April) and 25 Family and Friends/Reg. 24 (which is the same as in April).
22. As of the 30 September the Service were supporting 2 Private Foster carers and between them were caring for 6 children. 2 further Private Fostering Referrals were received in September relating to 2 children. One of the assessments was started in September, but the other applicant did not respond to our requests to meet with him and appropriate action was taken to progress this. All statutory visits concerning Private Fostering were 100% complaint with regards to timescales.
23. As of the 30 September there were 102 Special Guardianship Orders (S.G.O.'s) in place (compared to 88 at the end of April). This figure impacts on the overall total of foster carers as it means that 14 family and friends carers would have had their approval terminated when their S.G.O.'s were granted. During this period the Service worked with about 6 Special Guardianship Order families supporting them in relation to issues such as contact, managing children's behaviour or requests for funding.

Referrals/Placement

24. During July, August and September 33 new fostering placements were made; 11 in July. 19 in August and 3 in September. This is an increase of 20 new placements made compared to the last quarter. Out of the 33 new placements, 24 were placed in-house. Out of the 9 children placed with IFA carers, 2 were placed by the Emergency Duty Team following a Police Protection Order being taken out of office hours. 4 of the remaining 7 children were a sibling group needing to be placed together and there were no in-house carers who could accommodate a large sibling group.
25. During this period 16 placements ended; 8 because S.G.O's were granted, 5 returned home, 2 were adopted and 1 young person moved into independence.
26. As of the 30 September 2014 there were a total of 99 children living with in-house foster carers compared to 86 in the last quarter. The Service was also providing short term placements for 4 children from either Bedford Borough or Luton Borough Council.

Training

27. During July, August and September 10 training courses took place. Courses covered topics such as first aid, caring for babies withdrawing from drugs and alcohol, supporting the health of looked after children, attachment and brain development, identity and attachment, welcoming a foster child, hidden harm: the impact of drugs and alcohol on families, skills to foster and adoption

preparation training. Bespoke training was also provided for 2 families regarding crisis intervention.

28. Some of the training provided was open to foster carers from other Local Authorities and a number of carers from Bedford Borough, Luton and Milton Keynes attended training which enabled the Service to generate a small income.
29. As of the 30 September there were 69 fostering households who had completed their mandatory Training, Support and Development Standards; 14 households were yet to complete their portfolios, but still had time to address within the required timescale. 5 households were overdue in completing the TSD Standards and were outside the requirement timescale. Social Workers and the Training and Development Officer were providing additional support to help these carers achieve these standards.

Ofsted Notifications

30. Whenever a significant event happens, i.e. a child goes missing from placement or a serious incident/accident occurs, the agency have to report these to Ofsted. During this period there were 11 notifications; 2 in July where a child broke their wrist while skate boarding and 1 young person who went missing (for less than twenty-four hours). In August there were no notifications, although in September there were 9 notifications involving 2 young people; 1 went missing a total of 7 times (for less than twenty-four hours) and the other young person went missing twice (once for less than twenty-four hours and once between one-six days).

Allegations

31. There were no allegations made against foster carers between July and September.

Complaints

32. The Fostering Service received two complaints between July and September. one was in relation to a member of staff, this could not be investigated fully as the staff member has been off sick during this period. The other was from a family member of a child in care regarding the standard of care provided by the foster carer. Some of the issues raised were to do with the carers choice of shoes for the child, some miss fitting sandals, miscommunication regarding contact issues and inappropriate language/messages being used with the child. This complaint was dealt with in timescale and some of the issues were upheld and others were not. The carers have been spoken to about the areas of the complaint that were upheld and have changed their practice as a result.

Compliments

33. During this period staff within the Service received 4 compliments from foster carers in relation to the support they received.

Great Dads Award

34. In July Central Bedfordshire presented the “Great Dads” Award. There were 7 winners 4 of whom came from the Fostering Service, i.e.3 foster carers and 1 private foster carer.
35. In September Central Bedfordshire held a ‘Celebration of Fostering’ event which was held at Woburn Safari Park. It was held in recognition of those carers who had been fostering for many years. In addition, Certificates and gift baskets were presented to foster carers in the following categories:
 - Outstanding contribution to caring for children with disabilities.
 - Outstanding contribution to fostering.
 - My brilliant foster carer.
 - My brilliant family and friends foster carer
36. The foster carers who attended brought their foster children and birth children with them and enjoyed the festivities. They were treated to a parrot show, a reptile and snake encounter, a delicious BBQ and music at the end. Excellent feedback was received from a large number of foster carers and staff who attended the event.

Conclusion

37. The main focus has been to recruit more foster carers and this will continue in order to meet the target of recruiting 10 more foster carers (net gain) by the end of the financial year.
38. The number of foster carers has not increased since April; some of this is to do with the fact that at least 14 of our foster carers have been de-registered as S.G.O.’s are granted for these carers. This means that in order for the service to make a net gain of 10 foster carers we have to at least replace these 14 before we are even back to an even starting point.
39. The fees scheme has, however, meant that the service is now able to compete with its neighbouring Local Authorities and with I.F.A.’s. This has not been the case previously and was reflected in the high percentage of children in I.F.A. placements compared to in house.
40. Whilst the number of foster carers has not increased the number of placements in house has. The service is now caring for 99 children in house compared to 86 in June and 85 in April. There are, therefore, 14 more in house placements than there were at the start of the financial year which will be helping to make significant savings in relation to I.F.A. spend. This increase has been achieved mainly because of the fees scheme, for example, where a carer has now been able to give up work and therefore care for more children than they previously could or because we have been able to expand our foster carers approval so that they are now more able to consider children outside their previously limited approval range.

41. Added to this the service is currently assessing 15 prospective foster carers who all have panel dates booked in before the end of March 2015 where they will hopefully be approved.

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

None

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Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 1 December 2014
Subject: Six Monthly Report on the Adoption Service
April to September 2014
Report of: Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services
Summary: The report outlines the activity in the adoption service
during April to September 2014

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 report.

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 comments on 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. Until 3 December 2013 the Adoption Service was a shared service between Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough council. The service is now a single service, however with a shared Adoption panel. This report only contains statistics in relation to Central Bedfordshire Council.

Adoption Services

10. The Adoption Service is required to report at six-monthly intervals. 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 the first six months of 2014 there was a decrease for the first time in three years 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 14 children, a decrease from 35 in the same period last year. 14 households were approved as adopters and matches of 15 children to adopters were made.
12. 11 Adoption Orders were granted in respect of looked after children in Central Bedfordshire Council. The number for the year 2013/14 was 10.
13. As of the 30 September 2014, 11 adopted children and their families were in receipt of support. In addition contact plans were being made on behalf of 96 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. In the same period the team were working with 9 adult adoptees and their birth relatives, which represents a drop in numbers from previous years. 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. The team continues to be successful both in recruiting and assessing prospective adopters and in placing children with new families in a timely manner, in line with the Government's Adoption Reform Agenda. The Adoption Service 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.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Adoption Agency six month report

Background Papers:

None

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APPENDIX A

Adoption Agency

Six Month Update

**For the period
April- September 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 1 April to 30 September 2014, noting their achievements, clarifying the remit and focus of their work and identifying recommendations for the development of the service.
- 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's Corporate Parenting Panel.

1.1 STAFFING / SERVICE STRUCTURE

- 1.1.1 As of 30 September 2014 the Adoption Team of Central Bedfordshire Council is made up of the following staffing compliment:

- 1x Full time Practice Manager
- 3x Senior Practitioners (2 full time equivalent)
- 4x Social Workers (3.5 full time equivalent)
- 1x Full time Social Work Assistants
- 1x Adopter Stage One Project Worker
- 1x Administrator

We have lost the role of letterbox administrator: this has been included in the tasks of the Social Work Assistant

- 1.1.2 The service has remained largely fully staffed during this period.
- 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, including access to the Council's Assisted and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme. 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 Corporate Parenting service area. This includes a Recruitment and Marketing team.

1.2 THE ADOPTION PANEL

- 1.2.1 The Adoption Panel has remained a shared panel between Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council with separate decision-makers from each authority. It has been agreed that the panel will remain shared for the immediate future.
- 1.2.2 The Adoption Panel has been meeting twice a month and has been scheduled as such for the next year. During the first six months of this year, panel met on 11 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 1 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 30th September 2014 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	Adoption Social Worker, Bedford Borough
Social Work Member	Team Manager, Children with Disabilities Team (CBC)
Social Work Member	Social Worker, Adoption Team CBC
Medical Adviser	Consultant Community Paediatrician
Elected Member	Central Bedfordshire Council
Independent (Vice Chair)	Adopted Person
Independent	IRO (Bedford Borough)
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 the first 6 months of this year the Adoption Panel met 11 times. The statistics relate only to Central Bedfordshire cases presented at panel.

1.4.2 In this period the Agency Decision Maker decided that adoption should be the plan for 14 children

1.4.3 In relation to approvals, the panel recommended that 11 households were suitable to adopt a child. All applicants attended the panel. The target for the year is to approve 24 households, which is still achievable.

1.4.4 In terms of matching, the panel recommended that 15 children should be placed with particular adopters. This compares to 20 children in 2013/2014 from Central Bedfordshire Council, and shows that we are on target to place 26 children

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.

1.5.2 All Panel Members had an annual appraisal where their personal training needs were discussed and considered.

1.5.3 A full day's training will be held in October 2014, which will consider updates on the Adoption Reform Agenda and a presentation by members of the Teenage Adoption Panel .

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 the first 6 months of this year, there were 14 children from Central Bedfordshire referred to the service for adoption. This represents a significant drop in numbers compared to the same period last year which was 35 children; however 13 of these plans were subsequently rescinded, therefore it is possible that there is more detailed scrutiny of plans before being presented.

2.1 OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN WITH PLANS FOR ADOPTION

- 2.1.1 Of the 48 children who had plans for adoption made in 2013/2014, there are only three children where we are still looking for adopters. Of these we are pursuing positive links for two children and have some interest in the third child. Of the 14 children referred this year, 3 children's plans have changed in favour of an SGO, one child has been placed, 8 children have links and 2 are still subject to court proceedings.
- 2.1.2 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.
- 2.1.3 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 15 children in this period.
- 2.2.2 There were 4 sibling groups placed for adoption during the 6 month period.
- 2.2.3 2 of the adoption placements made during this period disrupted within the first two months of the placement. They involved a sibling group of 2 boys aged 3 and 5, and a 5 year old boy. Meetings with all professionals involved in each case (disruption meetings) will be held to review and look at any lessons which could be learned.

2.3 – TYPE OF ADOPTION PLACEMENT

- 2.3.1 Of the 15 children placed for adoption by Central Bedfordshire from April to September, 5 were placed with adopters assessed and approved by Central Bedfordshire and 10 were placed with adopters approved by another authority.
- 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 1 year.

2.4 – ETHNICITY OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION

- 2.4.1 Of the 15 children placed for adoption by Central Bedfordshire in the 6 month period, 11 were White British, 3 were of White/Asian ethnicity and 1 child was from a south-east Asian background

2.5 – AGES OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION

- 2.5.1 Of the 15 children placed for adoption by Central Bedfordshire in the 6 month period, 6 were aged 2 years or under, 2 were between 3-5 years and 7 were 4 years and above.

2.6 – GENDER OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION

- 2.6.1 Of the 15 children placed for adoption by Central Bedfordshire, 6 were female and 9 were male.

2.7 – ADOPTION ORDERS / SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDERS

- 2.7.1 Adoption Orders were made in respect of 11 children during the period 1 April to 30 September 2014 The previous year saw 10 adoption orders being granted.

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. It has been recognised that due to the increased number of children being considered for adoption, it has been hard for the team to also prioritise those children with plans for long term fostering. It has therefore been decided to recruit to the role of Family Finder for Permanency to ensure that these young people's plans are given equal consideration.

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 takes place during the year. Drop-in sessions have been arranged to coincide with National Adoption Week in November.

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 2013 successfully implemented the two stage process for adopters which was introduced as part of the Government's Adoption Reform Agenda
- 3.2.2 55 enquiries from prospective adopters were received in the 6 month period under review. The figure for the whole of 2013/14 was 98. At 30 September 2014 Central Bedfordshire had 15 sets of adopters in Stage one of the process and 10 in Stage 2. In total 11 households were approved during the period.

3.3 – DETAILS OF ADOPTERS

- 3.3.1 Of the adopters approved 9 households were White British, 1 couple were from a South American background, and 1 adopter was African Caribbean. 2 were single adopters. 1 household was a previous foster carer. 7 households had been matched with a child by 30 September 2014.

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 Modular training is offered to prospective adopters in Stage 2. 1 module runs every month on a rolling program.
- 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 published in April 2014 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 30 September 2014, the team was working directly with 11 adopted children and their families who were in need of support.
- 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 as they did not have a mental health diagnosis. This is an area of concern nationally which the Government is considering as part of its review of adoption support services. In respect of the children concerned we have challenged our local CAMH team and meanwhile continue to offer direct work with the children and their families.
- 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, all of which are very well attended. Since the disaggregation with Bedford Borough we have continued to provide some of these events as a shared service 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 30 September 2014 the Adoption Team were providing support to 9 adult adoptees and birth relatives who were seeking access to records and support in tracing.

4.2 – DISRUPTED ADOPTIONS

- 4.2.1 We are carefully reviewing the process in order to ensure that we can learn from this experience. This must be set against the very low number of adoptions in preceding years and the fact that the children involved were all in the older age group and therefore seen as having a higher risk factor in relation to placement success. Disruption meetings have been held to consider the lessons which can be learned from these two cases and an independent consultant has been asked to report on this. The findings will be disseminated to teams in December and January and a report brought to the next Corporate Parenting Panel.

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 the 6 month period received no 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-county 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 Council
- Associate 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.
- 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. The average time between a child entering care and being placed for adoption in Central Bedfordshire was 600 days, while the average figure for our statistical neighbours was 630 days

SECTION 6 CONCLUSION

- 6.0.1 The first 6 months of this financial year has continued to see an increase in children placed for adoption and adoption orders granted. The team is likely to exceed the projected number of placements for the year which was 26. We continue to be successful in matching the majority of our children in a timely way, which is reflected in a decrease in the time taken from Placement Order to placement.

- 6.0.2 Adopter enquiries have increased this year, with the team on target to receive over 100 enquiries. To date 11 households have been approved, but there are a further 10 which will be presented at panel in the next 4 months, making the target of 24 households achievable. The practice of pre-matching children with in-house adopters has led to almost all adopters having a child in placement within 6 months of being approved.
- 6.0.3 This practice also allows us to quickly identify those children where we will be unable to place them with CBC adopters in an appropriate timescale and begin searching nationally for families for children where there is a plan of adoption.

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

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