

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 22 January 2015

NOTICE OF MEETING

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Date & Time

Monday, 2 February 2015 at 10.00 a.m.

Venue at

Room 15, Priory House, Chicksands, Shefford

Richard Carr
Chief Executive

PLEASE NOTE THE START TIME

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

Elected Members (voting)

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

[Named Substitutes:

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

Officers (voting)

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.**

The use of arising images or recordings is not under the Council's control.

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 1 December 2014 (copy attached).

3. **Members' Interests**

To receive from Members any declarations on 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.	Corporate Apprenticeship Scheme To receive a presentation on the Corporate Apprenticeship Scheme.	
6.	Central Bedfordshire Council's Approach to Corporate Parenting Plan 2014 - 2017 To consider a report which sets out the Corporate Parenting Approach Plan 2014 – 2017 and accompanying Action Plan and seeks the Panel's support for the Approach Plan's implementation.	* 15 - 118
7.	Adoption and Fostering To receive the Adoption Agency and Fostering Service Statements of Purpose for 2014/15 and the Adoption Reform Grant for 2014/15.	* 119 - 148
8.	Quarter Three Fostering Service Report To consider a report outlining the activities in the Fostering Service during the third quarter of the 2014-15 financial year.	* 149 - 156

This page is intentionally left blank

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Room 15, Priory House, Chicksands, Shefford on Monday, 1 December 2014

PRESENT

Elected Members (voting)

Cllrs M A G Versallion (Chairman)
Mrs A Barker
D Bowater
Mrs S A Goodchild
A M Turner (in place of A L Dodwell)

Officers (voting)

Mr N Costin – Head of Housing Solutions
Mrs S Harrison – Director of Children’s Services

Carers (non-voting)

Mrs H Philips MBE

Apologies for Absence: **Elected Members (voting)**

A L Dodwell
N B Costin

Officers (voting)

Mrs J Dickinson – Head of Leisure and Libraries
Mrs J Ogley – Director of Social Care, Health and Housing
Mr T Keaveny – Assistant Director Housing Services

Officers in Attendance:

Ms A Craig	– Practice Manager Fostering
Ms J Edwards	– Virtual School Head
Mr K Harvey	– Head of Service Children with Disabilities
Mr G Jones	– Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
Ms E Kilcommins	– Commissioning Manager
Mr L Manning	– Committee Services Officer
Miss H Redding	– Assistant Director School Improvement
Ms M Short	– Participation Officer
Mrs J Singh	– Adoption Practice Manager
Mr E Wong	– Head of Corporate Parenting

- Others in Attendance: Children in Care Council Representatives
- SEND Representatives
- Ms E Orchard – Project Reseacher, Shortland-Palmer Consultancy
- Mr B Palmer – SEND Consultant, Shortland-Palmer Consultancy
- Ms S Walker – Project Manager, Shortland-Palmer Consultancy

CPP/14/26. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 13 October 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CPP/14/27. **Members' Interests**

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

CPP/14/28. **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman welcomed the Director of Children's Services to her first meeting of the Panel.

The Chairman referred to the recent Looked After Children awards evening on 24 October which he described as the best held too date. He congratulated those involved; in particular the Children in Care Council and the Assistant Director of Children's Services Operations.

CPP/14/29. **Engagement and Involvement of Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities**

The Panel considered a report which set out how Children's Services were responding to the requirements of the Children and Families Act 2014 to include children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in the development of the Local Offer. Members were aware that the Local Offer set out, in one place, information about the local provision of education, health and social care for children and young people who had special educational needs or were disabled.

A copy of a paper setting out an overview of the SEND participation project as well as learning, recommendations and structures was attached at Appendix A to the report and a slide pack by the Shortland-Palmer Consultancy entitled 'The *'Effective and Meaningful'* Participation of Children and Young People with SEND' was attached at Appendix B.

The Head of Service Children with Disabilities introduced the report, explaining the role played by parents and carers of children and young people with SEND in the form of a parent carer forum known as the Special Needs Action Panel (SNAP). He also described the commissioning of the Shortland-Palmer Consultancy to begin the work of ensuring that effective and meaningful participation for children and young people with SEND was evident in the reforms.

The Shortland-Palmer SEND Consultant, Project Manager and Project Researcher then worked through the appendices highlighting and developing aspects of the project and its aim of producing a strategy for the effective and meaningful participation of children and young people with SEND in the decisions that affect them as individuals.

Full discussion took place on various related issues including developments in other local authorities, funding, implementing cultural change to involve children and young people in decision making and assisting individuals to reach their potential, the involvement of children and young people with SEND within the CiCC and the extent to which children and young people with SEND could obtain their independence.

In conclusion the Chairman expressed his appreciation of the time and effort taken on the project and looked forward to receiving a further report on this matter in 2015.

NOTED

the progress made by Children's Services in responding to the requirements of the Children and Families Act 2014 and, in particular, in implementing the engagement and involvement of young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities to enable them to contribute to the Local Offer.

CPP/14/30. **Children in Care Council - Update**

The Panel received a verbal update from two Children in Care Council (CiCC) representatives. The report focused on the latest edition of the CiCC newsletter 'Say It Loud' and copies were circulated at the meeting.

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

Following the introduction to the newsletter discussion took place on a number of issues including the recruitment of additional Looked After Children to the CiCC, the contribution by CiCC members in helping to train ASYE (assessed and supported year in employment) social workers and participation in the introduction to a Central Bedfordshire Council DVD.

A Member referred to the article in the newsletter on the Looked After Children awards evening on 24 October and commented on how successful it had been. She added that a number of professional people had been present and that

their attendance, on a Friday evening, reflected the high regard in which the event was held.

NOTED

the verbal report.

CPP/14/31. **Out of County Residential Placements**

The Panel received a slide pack setting out the use of residential placements outside Central Bedfordshire for some Looked After Children together with the related monitoring and quality assurance measures that were undertaken.

The Commissioning Manager worked through the slides drawing Members' attention to particular points of interest. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations stressed that the use of out of county residential placements arose because of the need to match the specific, complex needs of some Looked After Children with the most appropriate residential homes. However, the meeting was also advised that, whilst some children's needs required access to a national resource, consideration was currently being given to the possible relocation of others back to local residential care within Bedfordshire.

In response to a Member's query regarding the standard of health care provided to those Looked After Children in out of county placements the Commissioning Officer explained that that they received the same level of medical attention as the children in Bedfordshire and standards were monitored through the submission of monthly outcome reports on each child. Social care professionals were also updated on annual check ups and outcomes related to these.

The Member then referred to the proposed possible relocation of some children to local residential homes within Bedfordshire and the possible negative impact on those children who had settled and established friendships in their out of county placements. In response the Director of Children's Services explained that the individual circumstances of each child would be considered before any decision was made to relocate.

In response to a Member's query regarding regular and regulatory visits to children in out of county placements the Head of Corporate Parenting explained that such checks took place at least every six weeks but, based on individual requirements, could occur more often. Their aim was to establish that the placement was, and remained, suitable for the child.

NOTED

the slidepack setting out the use of out of county placements for some Looked After Children and the related monitoring and quality assurance measures.

CPP/14/32. Interim Report of the Virtual School for Looked After Children

The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided information on the role of the Virtual School for Looked After Children and the indicative outcomes for Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire in the Academic Year 2013/14. In addition the report identified the steps taken since September 2013 to develop the role of the Virtual School in order to improve outcomes for Looked After Children and identified the next stages of its development.

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

- The Virtual School
- Background
- Exclusions
- Attendance
- Pupil's Achievement
(including Key Stage 1 provisional results 2013/14, Key Stage 2 provisional results 2014, Key Stage 4 provisional results 2014)
- Governance
- Priority actions for 2014/15

Members' attention was drawn to how schools used the Pupil Premium funding to improve the progress and outcomes of Looked After Children. The meeting was advised that the Pupil Premium had been increased to £1900 per pupil in April 2014 and that how, after consultation with schools and other stakeholders, it had been agreed that the Virtual School would retain £400 from the £1900 allocated to each pupil. The remaining £1500 would be given to schools on a termly basis to support them in raising educational achievement whilst schools could request additional funding to support Looked After Children, if needed, using the clearly defined application process.

With regard to permanent exclusions the meeting noted that the national comparative data would be released later in December 2014 and it would be included in the Virtual School annual report in March 2015.

The Assistant Director School Improvement advised the meeting of the forthcoming introduction of a Pupil Premium for pre-school children and the support for the introduction of a Pupil Premium to be paid to students post 16 as there was nothing currently in place for this age group. The Virtual School Head referred to the significant positive impact the latter would have for students if it were to proceed.

A Member queried the level and type of support offered to foster carers who were experiencing challenging behaviour by Looked After Children with regard to school attendance. In response the Virtual School Head, whilst acknowledging the emotional problems so often experienced by Looked After Children, stressed that expectations of such children should be the same as those living with their birth parents. She explained that a package of measures

to assist children could be provided, as could alternative pathways, with each case being considered on an individual basis. The Head of Corporate Parenting added that foster carers were supported by social workers.

The Chairman referred to the performance by Year 11 Looked After Children in GCSE English and mathematics and discussion took place on whether the level of attainment could be improved. Some Members expressed concern that expectations were set too high and that it was unrealistic to expect all children to reach the required standard. In response, however, the Virtual School Head explained that a support system was offered to students to assist them and that expectations of examination performance were based on the outcomes of the children in Year 6. She emphasised that Looked After Children should be given the opportunity to reach their potential.

Further discussion on this issue including the cause of the disengagement by some Looked After Children in Year 11 which adversely affected their examination results. A Children in Care Council representative commented that disengagement took place because of the feeling of uncertainty regarding future direction.

NOTED

the progress made to date through the work of the Virtual School in improving the educational achievements by Looked After Children and the measures identified to develop the role of the School in order to further improve the academic outcomes of Looked After Children in the future.

CPP/14/33. **Quarter Two Report on the Fostering Service**

The Panel received a report by the Director of Children's Services which outlined activity in the Fostering Service during Quarter Two (July to September 2014).

The report contained updates on the following areas:

- Recruitment of Foster Carers
- Assessments
- Referrals/Placements
- Training
- Ofsted Notifications
- Allegations
- Complaints
- Complements
- Great Dads Award
- Conclusion

The Practice Manager Fostering introduced the report and highlighted items for Members' attention. She referred to the apparently high number of Ofsted notifications which had taken place as a result of what were defined as

'significant events' occurring, such as a child going missing or a serious accident or emergency. However, she added that the current logging procedure generated a false impression of the number of significant events and the procedure was to be revised.

Turing next to fostering placements the Practice Manager Fostering stated that there had been an increase of 29 available placements in comparison to the beginning of April. This had been achieved through the commitment and hard work of the fostering team and resource team working with foster carers to expand their approval range and support them in taking on more children.

Members noted the positive developments in relation to placements including the increase in the number of children living with in-house foster carers compared to the last quarter, up from 86 to 99. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations commented, however, that the recruitment of in-house foster carers at a level which would meet the target figure remained a challenge.

Last, the Chairman praised the 'Celebration of Fostering' event held in recognition of those carers who had been fostering for many years and how the event had been genuinely appreciated by the participants.

NOTED

the content of the Quarter Two report on the Fostering Service for the period July to September 2014.

CPP/14/34. Six Monthly Report on the Adoption Service - April to September 2014

The Panel received a report by the Director of Children's Services which outlined the activity in the adoption service over the six month period from April to September 2014.

The six month update, attached at Appendix A to the report, covered the following areas:

- Introduction
- Children and Adoption
- Adopters
- Adoption Support Services
- Other Activities
- Conclusion

For Members' benefit the Adoption Practice Manager introduced the report. She drew Members' attention to the reduction 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 represented the first decrease in three years. In connection with this issue the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations advised the Panel of the impact of recent case law on adoption rates and the current national debate on adoption.

NOTED

the content of the six monthly report on the Adoption Service for the period April to September 2014.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.30 a.m. and concluded at 1.05 p.m.)

Say It Loud!

Welcome to another edition of the children in care council's newsletter, we have worked really hard to change the service for all young people to give them a better experience of being a looked after child and a care leaver. We are going to tell you some of the things that the CiCC have been up to the last few months.

Awards Evening

This year the awards evening was held on Friday 24th October. It was the biggest event to date, with over 200 nominations and over 100 young people attending. Cllr Versallion presented the awards and said: "I'm always delighted to attend this awards event, and to hear some of the amazing achievements by these truly inspiring children and young people. They really do prove that if you put your mind to something then the sky's the limit.



Summer Activities

During the summer holiday we arranged a variety of activities for the young people to participate in. We did activities such as Kempston Outdoor Centre, Gulliver's Land and the cinema. During the activities the older children in care council acted as peer mentors, this would give them a chance to ask any questions that they may be afraid to ask their foster carers or social workers about.

Children's Commissioner

Two members of our CiCC have been attending meetings with the Children's Commissioner young expert group in London. We have been meeting to change the national survey that goes out every year to the young people, this is so we can get views and opinions on how good services are and how they can be improved. We have enclosed a leaflet with information on where to find the survey and would be grateful if you could complete this so we can also use the results to make things better in Central Bedfordshire.

Christmas Events

Monday 22nd December – Flitwick Village Hall. Christmas Party for young people over 16. For more information or to book a place please speak to your worker.

Tuesday 23rd December – Pizza Hut & Cineworld, Bedford. For young people aged 8-15, places are limited please contact Marie Short on 0300 300 4881.

Introducing Sue Harrison



We have a new Director of Children's services, her name is Sue Harrison (pictured left), we met up with her to introduce the CiCC and what we do. Sue is really interested in what our views are and we will be meeting with her to give her updates. Sue has written a blog for children and young people and we have added it to the back of our newsletter.

We looked forward to working with Sue and welcome her to Central Bedfordshire.

THANKS FOR READING OUR NEWSLETTER! DAYTONA, CHARLOTTE & AMY!

SUE'S BLOG FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Hello,

You may well be wondering who is this person writing a blog? Well, I am your new Director of Children's Services. I have a wonderful job as I am responsible for making sure that young people in Central Bedfordshire are supported by good quality services from the moment they are born until they reach adulthood. These services include Children's Centres, youth work, schools and social work teams. I have already been able to visit some wonderful schools including Redbourne Upper School, where I was pleasantly surprised to find a real life farm as part of the school! I saw some amazing art work produced by students at Robert Bloomfield Middle School.

This is my first blog written especially for young people. I write a blog each month which you are all welcome to read, but it is aimed at an adult audience. I hope that you will tell me whether you have found this blog interesting to read and whether you think it would be a good idea for me to write a regular blog for young people. Thank you to Amy, Charlotte and Daytona, from the Children in care Council, who gave me useful feedback on my first attempt!

I am sure you have all experienced starting a new school. It's an exciting time, a chance to make new friends but like any new experience there are nervous feelings too! Starting a new job is a bit like starting a new school. There are a lot of new faces and names to learn! I am very grateful for all the support that everyone has given me since I arrived in Central Bedfordshire council six weeks ago. From my secretary, Annette, who has made sure I get to the right place at the right time, to our head teachers who have kindly invited me to their schools, and all the staff who are so proud of the children they support.

I have two grown up children. My son lives and works in Switzerland, and my daughter is studying for an English degree at Leeds University. My daughter had to spend a considerable amount of time in hospital as she was growing up, so I understand how for some young people there are additional challenges that are part of life. Overcoming these challenges is daily routine for some of you and I am committed to making sure that all children and young people have the best support to help you make the most of your individual talents.

I would like to find out more from you and discover what you are most proud of as a young citizen of Central Bedfordshire. Perhaps you have questions for me or ideas of services you think I should go and visit. Perhaps you would like to tell me more about your experiences growing up here. I am very interested in your views and hope I will meet you when I am visiting schools or at one of our young people's summit which I will be telling you more about next time.

Sue Harrison

Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

2 February 2015

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL'S APPROACH TO CORPORATE PARENTING PLAN 2014 - 2017

Report of:

Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services
(sue.harrison@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Advising Officers:

Gerard Jones, Assistant Director Operations
(gerard.jones@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Edward Wong, Head of Corporate Parenting
(edward.wong@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Purpose of this report:

- This report summarises the key points of the Corporate Parenting Approach Plan 2014 – 2017
- Makes explicit the Action Plan to implement the Approach Plan.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Committee is asked to note the content and support the implementation of Central Bedfordshire Council's approach to Corporate Parenting 2014 – 2017.

Issues

1. Key internal and external partners have commented on the Approach Plan. Core members of the Children in Care Council and a group of care leavers have also commented on it.
2. The Central Bedfordshire Council's Approach to Corporate Parenting Plan (Appendix A) consists of three sections.
3. Section One describes the legislative framework, leading to the rationale in creating the new Corporate Parenting Service and its achievement so far.

4. Section Two sets out the Priorities and Strategic Objectives for 2014 to 2017. There are seven Objectives:
 - **Objective 1:** Supporting families to stay together where it is safe to do so by managing risk and supporting children on the edge of care
 - **Objective 2:** Delivery of sufficiently good quality and affordable placements and permanence options for children who come into our care
 - **Objective 3:** Ensuring all Looked After Children (LAC) achieve their potential in education, employment and training
 - **Objective 4:** Ensuring the physical, emotional and mental wellbeing of our looked after children is good and that they are safe from harm
 - **Objective 5:** Listening to and acting on the views of looked after children and young people
 - **Objective 6:** Supporting and guiding our young people through the transition from being looked after to living independently
 - **Objective 7:** Expectations of Council Officers in discharging their duties as Corporate Parents
5. Section Three describes the Corporate Parenting Panel's monitoring role.
6. There are four Appendices to the Approach Plan. Appendix 1 is Central Bedfordshire's pledge to Children in Care. Appendix 2 is the Charter to Care Leavers. Appendix 3 is the Action Plan which was produced by the Corporate Parenting Operations Group and sets out the actions needed to implement the Central Bedfordshire Council Approach to Corporate Parenting Plan.
7. Appendix 4 is the Sufficiency Plan. The Sufficiency Plan outlines how the Council will meet its statutory duty to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within its area to meet the needs of Central Bedfordshire's LAC and Care Leavers.
8. The Sufficiency Plan also captures the known demand for accommodation for our children and Care Leavers and provides details of how the Council will commission and influence accommodation provision and other types of provision to meet the changing demand from our children and young people.
9. This approach is coherent and complimentary to the Approach to Corporate Parenting Plan and aims to support the vision to deliver better outcomes for our LAC and care leavers by having the right placement or accommodation in the right place, at the right time.

Reason/s for decision

10. Not only is it good practice to have an Approach to Corporate Parenting Plan, it is also an Ofsted requirement.

Council Priorities

11. The Central Bedfordshire Council Approach to Corporate Parenting Plan supports the Council's priorities listed below:
 - improved educational attainment of looked after children and employment opportunities for care leavers
 - promote health and well being and protect the vulnerable. Looked after children and care leavers are considered vulnerable groups.

Corporate Implications

12. Corporate parenting responsibility impacts on the Council as a whole as well as the voluntary and independent sectors.

The Group adopts a one-Council approach to meet our corporate parenting responsibilities.

Legal Implications

13. There is a statutory requirement in the Children's Act 2008 for each Council to have a Sufficiency Plan.

Financial Implications

14. By providing better accommodation provision closer to home, the Council will secure efficiencies from placement budgets.

Equalities Implications

15. Looked After Children (LAC) and care leavers are considered vulnerable groups. In order to implement the Approach to Corporate Parenting Plan, an Action Plan (Appendix 3) has been drawn up with a view to meeting their specific needs.

Conclusion and next Steps

16. The Action Plan makes explicit the steps being taken to improve the life chances of our LAC, young people and care leavers. The Implementation and Monitoring system is described in Section Three of the Action Plan.

Appendices:

Appendix A - Our Approach to Corporate Parenting in Central Bedfordshire Council 2014 - 2017

Background Papers

None

Appendix A

Our approach to Corporate Parenting in Central Bedfordshire Council 2014 - 2017



Contents

Section One – Introduction and Context	2
Introduction.....	2
Legislative Framework.....	3
Key achievements	4
Future challenges	6
What do our Children in Care say?.....	8
Section Two: Priorities & Strategic Objectives	9
Strategic objectives.....	9
Objective 1: Supporting families to stay together where it is safe to do so & support families at the edge of care.....	10
Objective 2: Delivery of sufficient placements and permanence options for children who come into our care	11
Objective 3: Ensuring all looked after children achieve their full potential in education, employment and training.....	13
Objective 4: Ensuring the physical, emotional and mental wellbeing of our look after children is good and they are safe from home.	15
Objective 5: Listening to and acting on the views of looked after children and young people	17
Objective 6: Supporting our young people through the transition to adulthood.....	18
Objective 7: Annette will edit	19
Section Three: Implementation and Monitoring	21
Corporate Parenting Panel	21
Appendices	22
Appendix 1: Central Bedfordshire’s Pledge	22
Appendix 2: Charter to Care Leavers.....	24
Appendix 3: Managing Resources for Children Looked After and Care Leavers..	27
Appendix 4: Other Policies and Action Plans linked to the Corporate Parenting Plan	27
Contact Us	28

Section One – Introduction and Context

Introduction

Most children and young people live successful and happy lives within their families and have little need for external support other than that provided universally by services such as Health or Education. However, for some, targeted and specialised support is required to help address particular problems and maintain the family as a unit. Such support will vary and may come from Schools, Early Help Services or Health Services. Therefore, regardless of the form it takes, services will always be based on a full assessment of the child or young person's needs within the family, will be planned and coordinated, and delivered to agreed outcomes to ensure their best interests are met.

For a small number of children and young people such interventions are insufficient to ensure their safety and well-being. In these cases, either with parental agreement or through care proceedings, the Council will need to assume responsibility. The responsibility of local authorities in improving outcomes and actively promoting the life chances of children they look after has become known as '**Corporate Parenting**'. This is in recognition that the task must be shared by the whole local authority and partner agencies. The role of the corporate parent is to act as the best possible parent for each child they look after and to advocate on his/her behalf to secure the best possible outcomes (Children Act 1989, Guidance & Regulations Vol. 2, Care Planning, Placement and Review, DfES 2010). The term 'Looked After' refers to any child or young person for whom the Authority has, or shares, parental responsibility or for whom the Authority provides care and accommodation to the child or young person on behalf of their parent.

The term "child" refers to any child or young person between 0-18 years. The Local Authority also has a duty and responsibility to those young people who leave their long term care from the age of 16 years until they reach the age of 21 years, or 25 if they are in higher education. This group of young people is often referred to as care leavers.

Whilst there may be a very small number of children with disabilities who cannot live at home because of safeguarding issues, there are many for whom the Local Authority may provide short breaks of care who will not necessarily be considered as 'looked after'. However some of these children may be entitled to a Leaving Care Service.

Councillors have a lead role in ensuring that their Council acts as an effective corporate parent for every child and young person in their care by actively supporting standards of care and seeking the high quality outcomes that every good parent would want for their child. Central Bedfordshire Council's councillors are committed to ensuring that decisions are made in the best possible interests of families living and working in their area.

This plan describes how we will develop our current arrangements to improve the lives of the children in our care. The intention is to bring together the range of activities across the Council and children's partnership at all stages of the care journey, including a clear focus on supporting families to stay together, wherever it is

safe to do so, and minimizing the need for children to become looked after.

Throughout the plan the focus is on describing what will change in relation to our work with looked after children and children on the edge of care. The document is therefore an action plan for the future rather than an attempt to cover every detail of our current preventative and support services.

It establishes 7 Key Objectives in delivering services to children and young people in care and leaving care:

- **Objective 1:** Supporting families to stay together where it is safe to do so by managing risk and supporting children on the edge of care
- **Objective 2:** Delivery of sufficiently good quality and affordable placements and permanence options for children who come into our care
- **Objective 3:** Ensuring all looked after children achieve their potential in education, employment and training
- **Objective 4:** Ensuring the physical, emotional and mental wellbeing of our looked after children is good and that they are safe from harm
- **Objective 5:** Listening to and acting on the views of looked after children and young people
- **Objective 6:** Supporting and guiding our young people through the transition from being looked after to living independently
- **Objective 7:** To ensure Central Bedfordshire Council officers are good corporate parents.

The legislative framework and the national and local context, which form the starting point for the plan, are described in the following three pages. The rest of the document is structured to outline how these seven objectives are to be delivered with each section describing what we will do in that area and concluding with a summary of the identified actions.

Legislative Framework

The collective responsibility for local authorities was first laid out in The Children Act 1989. Subsequent government guidance for Councilors, “If this were my child” (DfES 2003), reiterated the leading role of Councilors in ensuring that their Council acts as an effective corporate parent for every child and young person in care, actively supporting standards of care and seeking the high quality outcomes that every good parent would want for their own child. Councillors are encouraged to approach their responsibilities by asking the question: “What would I want if this were my child?” As well as their responsibilities to their looked after children and young people, Section 27 of the Children Act 1989 places a duty on Health, Housing and Education services to assist children and young people’s social care services to fulfill their functions under the Act – providing help, support and services as part of their

corporate parenting responsibilities.

The Children Act 2004 emphasizes the role of collaborative service agreements in achieving the right services for children and young people. Other key legislation and guidance governing the provision of children and young people is detailed in Appendix 3.

The legislative framework sets high expectations for Councils and their partners to improve outcomes for looked after children and young people through ensuring placement choice, stability, excellent education and dedicated health services. A raft of new regulations and statutory guidance has been published to underpin this policy direction to support local authorities and other agencies to deliver improved outcomes for children entering the care system.

Expectations of Partner Agencies

Central Bedfordshire Council owns the Corporate Parenting Plan but there is a shared vision whereby we work with our internal and external partners to achieve the best outcomes for our looked after children.

In order to deliver this Plan we need to make explicit the individual functions, including roles and responsibilities of the relevant council departments and partner agencies to ensure that the development and delivery of their services take into account, and wherever possible meet, the needs of looked after children and care leavers. The Corporate Parenting Plan, whilst 'owned' by the Local Authority, is a vision that is also shared by our partners to ensure we act as an effective corporate parent for all children in care, actively supporting standards of care and seeking the high quality outcomes that every good parent would want for their child.

Inspection Framework

The legislation has been underpinned and strengthened through the Ofsted inspection framework and the Ofsted publications on the research conducted by the Children's Rights Director for England. These helpful documents clarify the high expectations and emerging best practice for councils, as well as encompassing the views of children and young people in care.

Key Achievements of the Corporate Parenting Service

Service Development

In anticipation of the implementation of the Family Justice Review and the revised Public Law Outline (PLO), the Service reconfiguration has focussed on:

- Improving the average time for Court Work relating to care proceedings and achieving permanency for children in a timely manner.

- Establishing small social work teams with clearly defined accountabilities for casework and supervision.
- All Looked After Children and Young People receiving their health assessments in a timely manner, which in turns allows their health needs to be assessed and managed more efficiently and effectively without delays.
- Launching the new Corporate Parenting Service and within it a new Resource and Placement Team that will drive quality when commissioning new provision.
- Endorsing the Department for Education (DfE) Charter for Care Leavers, which sets out how care leavers will be treated and the financial support they should expect to receive from their local authority. As a consequence our Financial Policy has been rewritten. We are in the process of writing a simple guide for care leavers which will inform them about what assistance is available.
- Ensuring progress in educational outcomes is being achieved through closer working across Services. This includes the appointment of the Virtual School Head teacher and establishing a Virtual Schools Governing Board. The Governing Board monitors performance including rigorous monitoring of pupils' Personal Education Plans (PEP), attendance, educational progress and the impact and use of the Pupil Premium to improve educational outcomes.
- Committing to co-production in service design and delivery with parents of children with disabilities. This has resulted in the opening of our South and East Hubs which provides services for children and young people with physical and learning disabilities under 18.

Quality Improvements and Performance

- Embedding robust performance quality through monthly management performance reports.
- Ensuring good case audit outcomes through our internal case audit process.
- Obtaining and providing positive feedback from Court and Legal Counsels.
- Marked improvement on key performance indicators such as health assessments.
- Ensuring all children in care have a consistent named Independent Reviewing Officer who provides on going monitoring and review of children's care plans.
- Ensuring the Children in Care Council (CiCC) works with the Corporate Parenting Panel to improve services for Central Bedfordshire Council's looked after children.

- Listening to the views of our children and young people. 100% of children and young people who took part in our care survey, undertaken by the Children in Care Council in 2013, stated that they felt their wishes and feelings were listened to.
- Being part of the Eastern Region Consortium IFA placements has improved the quality and cost effectiveness of our commissioned placements with IFAs.
- Analysing complaints about the service provided for looked after children and care leavers, summarising emerging themes and issues and reporting on them to enable learning from these to improve practice. The majority of complaints relate to communication and accuracy of information in individual cases. These are case specific rather than systemic issues, and are responded to appropriately.

Demand and Resource Management

- Ensuring enhanced competitiveness in recruiting and retaining foster carers through the introduction of the Fostering Fee Scheme
- Driving greater value for monetary efficiencies through robust re-tendering of a number of key services, for example supervised contact and Residential Placements.
- Increasing the accommodation choices available to care leavers through a tendering exercise undertaken in March 2014, ensuring more flexible care and support packages, delivering better outcomes and best value. We identified 8 care providers to offer this service in meeting our sufficiency duty. This is a new development for Central Bedfordshire Council.
- Achieving significant reduction of locum social workers by increasing the number of permanent social workers.

Future Challenges

A number of key challenges exist in meeting the national policy context.

In April 2014, Central Bedfordshire Council restructured its Children's Services department to create a 'Corporate Parenting Service', which comprises of the Looked after Children, Leaving Care, Fostering and Adoption Services. The rationale for this change included:

- Greater collaboration amongst closely related specialist teams (for example, Court and Permanency Planning Teams, Long-term Looked After Team, Leaving Care Teams, Fostering Teams, Adoption Teams and Resource and Placement Team) that place the interest of looked after children and care leavers firmly at the centre of service delivery.
- Greater consistency in care planning and management oversight.

- Greater control over strategic direction and in day to day operations.
- More effective systemic response to both external and internal drivers for change and innovation.
- More efficient deployment of limited resources.

One of the key challenges of being a small unitary authority is in developing the market and the provision of locally provided services and placement options. To meet this challenge we know we have to:

- Increase the number of in-house foster carers, which is a challenge that we will strive to meet. Our plans for doing this are outlined in the Fostering Recruitment Plan & the Managing Resources for Children Looked After and Care Leavers Plan.
- We are already working in partnership with our neighbouring authorities in joint delivery of services under a new framework with Independent Fostering Agencies.
- As the needs of children and families change it will be necessary to identify appropriate services that can meet those needs, some of which may be fairly specialist. We will identify emerging trends and encourage the local market to deliver such services.

Progress in educational outcomes has been achieved through closer working across services. The establishment of a Virtual School Governing Body has been effective in monitoring performance and children and young people's education progress. It plays a key role in delivering support to Looked After Children to improve and attain good educational outcomes. As a relatively new service, it is vital that teams understand the role that the Virtual School can play in promoting continuity and in ensuring that where there are emergency placement moves that education will not be adversely affected.

We are working closely with Housing colleagues to address the housing and accommodation needs of care leavers who are represented on the Corporate Parenting Operations Group as they contribute to shaping the future housing strategy for looked after young people and care leavers.

Health outcomes¹ for looked after children in Central Bedfordshire Council have shown significant improvement since 2012. The service has developed and put in place clear systems and processes to meet our statutory requirements. We are working closely with colleagues in Health and alongside the CCG Looked After Children Health Strategy to ensure that all children receive their health assessments, including those who are in placements outside of our Local Authority. Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs) essential to monitoring young people's emotional

¹ Data source: SFR50_2013 LA Table, Department for Education

health and well being showed a 100% completion rate. The average score was 14.8².

What do our Children in Care say?

We undertake regular consultation with our children in care, particularly with the Children in Care Council (CiCC). This group represents the interests of all looked after children and care leavers and regularly presents issues to the Corporate Parenting Panel. Their feedback, throughout the course of the last year and their views have been central to the development of this plan. We have incorporated those views throughout the document.

The most recent survey for children in care in Central Bedfordshire Council found that 74% of those responding felt they were satisfied that they were able to see their worker regularly. The remaining 26% did not feel they were visited regularly enough and made comments, which included: "I want to see her more." and "I've had so many different workers." The survey therefore suggested that some young people would like more frequent visits in addition to statutory visits as well as fewer changes in social workers.

95% of children and young people confirmed that they had the opportunity to speak to their worker alone. Of those young people 79% confirmed they had regular contact with their workers in addition to their statutory visits through various methods, such as telephone calls and text messages.

Out of the survey 89% of children and young people said they are aware of the complaints process.

All of the children and young people surveyed stated that they felt their wishes and feelings are listened to. When further comments were requested regarding the children and young people's experience of their time in care the responses given included:

"They have done the best to help."

"It's helping me learn good things and keeps me safe sometimes."

"I have had so many different workers."

"It's really good." / "It's helped me loads" / "It is fun at times."

² Scores are banded in the following way: a score of under 14 is considered normal; 14-16 is borderline cause for concern and 17 or over is a cause for concern.

Section Two: Priorities & Strategic Objectives

Given the context of the demographics and the partnership working, the key emphasis will be on ensuring that, where possible and where it is safe to do so, children remain in their birth families. Where this is not possible, we will endeavour to provide sufficient, high quality placements locally to meet their needs.

The number of children looked after by Central Bedfordshire Council should not be any higher than the regional or national average, or higher than our statistical neighbours, particularly given the local demographic context of the area.

Wherever possible, and where it is consistent with the best interests of the child, we will look at placements with family and friends carers or Special Guardianship Order placements, as the preferred option. Where this is not possible we will look towards minimising the time a child spends in the care of the local authority, and where this is not possible look at achieving early permanence for the child.

Our Early Help services are structured in such a way to minimise the number of families needing to be referred to Children's Social Care. Intensive intervention, using evidence-based approaches, supports families who would otherwise access specialist services through Social Care.

Our priorities for children and young people in our care are based on our universal ambitions for every child and young person living in Central Bedfordshire Council, whatever their background. This is because our children in care and care leavers have the right to expect the same outcomes as for any other child or young person.

Our ambition is to protect, promote and respect the rights of every child and young person in our care and to help them to achieve the best possible outcomes in terms of their health, education and future prosperity.

Strategic objectives

Objective 1: Supporting families to stay together where it is safe to do so and supporting families at the edge of care

Why are we going to do this?

Research and evidence tells us that when children come into care, the emotional trauma caused by separation from their families can have a negative impact on their emotional well-being. Not only can this cause further issues as the child is growing up, in many cases it requires expert therapeutic support to help overcome these issues. We also know that the trauma caused by abuse and neglect can dramatically outweigh the consequences of separating a child from his or her family.

Early intervention can help to restore some of the damage caused to children and young people's development and build the family structures necessary to maintain a safe environment for the child. This requires a robust approach to risk management and clear application of the child protection thresholds.

We also know that there is an increase in the number of teenage children coming into care. We are yet to fully understand the reasons for this emerging trend. We can see that there is a clear case for supporting parents of teenagers, particularly in order to reduce the risk of criminal activity and coming into contact with the youth justice service.

What are we going to do?

We recognise that within this plan there is a clear emphasis on maintaining children within their home environment where this is possible. We also recognise that this will require additional support to families where it is safe for a child to go home. The support will be offered either through Family Support Teams or by accessing universal services available through the Early Help services.

Our Family Support and Early Help locality parenting teams will work with families through 'step-down' processes where children in care are returned home. Where care leavers have started their own families, support of the parenting service will be sought to assist in further strengthening their parenting skills.

A range of interventions will be provided for disabled children and their families through dedicated hubs from which outreach and community work is undertaken with families.

We will work with parents and children who are referred for help to ensure they access the appropriate help and support that they need, for example the

Freedom Project, Drug and Alcohol Services and Mental Health Services as well as supporting children whose parents are affected by these issues.

Our Family Intervention Service (FIS) and Family and Adolescent Support Team (FAST) services will be robustly managed to ensure that families are receiving the right level of service at the right time.

Objective 2: Delivery of sufficient placements and permanence options for children who come into our care

Why are we going to do this?

Securing sufficient accommodation that meets the needs of children who are in care is a vital step in delivering improved outcomes for this vulnerable group. Having the right placement in the right place, at the right time, is a vital factor in improving placement stability, which in turn is a critical success factor in relation to improving outcomes for children. The statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for children in care provides clarification of the 'sufficiency duty' placed on local authorities, under 22(G) of the Children Act 1989, to secure sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of children in their care.

The sufficiency duty applies in respect of all children who are defined as 'looked after' under the 1989 Act. An important mechanism – both in improving outcomes for children and in having sufficient accommodation to meet their needs – is to take earlier, preventive action to support children and families so that fewer children come into care.

This guidance requires that from April 2011 and by working with their partners, local authorities must be in a position to secure, where reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for looked after children in their local authority area. The Managing Resources for Children Looked After and Care Leavers Plan (2014) demonstrates how Central Bedfordshire Council intends to achieve this. We will ensure children and young people are involved in all aspects of the commissioning cycle, including the provision and procurement of services, reviews and evaluation.

It is recognised that where children are placed more than 20 miles outside of the local authority area their relationships with friends and family and with the support networks they might otherwise have created, are disrupted, causing stress for the child. It also creates difficulty in promoting and maintaining contact, identifying suitable educational provision and specialist health provisions. We will seek to address this through our Managing Resources for Children Looked After and Care Leavers Plan and our Fostering Recruitment Plan with targets to increase the number of in house foster carers.

What are we going to do?

We need to ensure that the processes for making a referral for a placement is rigorously complied with and detailed information provided to support the search for placements. We need a wide range of high quality independent providers and placements to complement our in house provision, although in house provision will always be the preferred option. The Managing Resources for Children Looked After and Care Leavers Plan sets out the steps through which efforts are made to secure local and high quality placements for children and young people. [Please see Appendix 3 for the full text of the Managing Resources for Children Looked After and Care Leavers Plan]

We are committed to giving our looked after children and young people a sense of security, continuity and commitment. This requires us to look at a variety of permanence options and be clear about when we consider which options. This sense of 'permanence' includes emotional, physical and legal stability and, as corporate parents, we must commit to providing a plan to achieve permanence for all looked after children. This can be achieved through:

- Reunification with the birth family
- Living with other family and friends
- Placements with permanent foster carers until adulthood
- Special Guardianship Orders
- Adoption

The Managing Resources for Children Looked After and Care Leavers Plan outlines a number of measures we already have in place to ensure that we have sufficient placements for children coming into care. We have set ambitious target for increase of our in house foster carers by 2019 which we are supporting with the introduction of a new fee scheme in April 2014.

A panel has been established to focus on Looked After Children who have had 2+ placement moves. This is chaired by the Head of Service for Corporate Parenting, with input from other Managers from the Looked After Children, Fostering and Adoption, Children with Disabilities, Conference and Reviewing Service, Virtual School and CAMHS. The panel considers the case management issues that may impact on placement stability in order to identify any additional resources and actions required to reduce the risk of further placement breakdown and improve longer term placement stability.

Our residential care provision is currently delivered through a commissioned arrangement with external providers to meet the needs of children with complex emotional or specific needs due to their disability. We also have a very small number of children who have a statement of education (SEN) and are placed in specialist residential schools. We anticipate a possible increase in the number of residential and overnight placements for children with disabilities in the coming years, therefore we will ensure that a focused

exercise is undertaken to assess the future capacity of residential provision for children with disabilities and those with complex needs.

Objective 3: Ensuring all looked after children achieve their full potential in education, employment and training

Why are we going to do this?

Education and raising aspirations is a key area of focus for our Looked after Children and Care Leavers. Central Bedfordshire Council works in partnership with the University of Bedfordshire, Youth Support Team and Virtual School to offer support, provision and resources to be available to meet the educational needs of our children and young people.

The Children and Families Act 2014 requires local authorities to appoint a person who will monitor the educational achievements of looked after children. Central Bedfordshire Council has appointed a Virtual School Head and whilst it is the responsibility of individual schools to support pupils on their roll, the Virtual School plays a vital role in ensuring that each looked after child achieves optimum educational outcomes at each stage of their schooling.

We also know that as a result of their poor start in life, within Central Bedfordshire Council there is an attainment gap between those who are looked after and children who have not had any social care intervention. We know that educational attainment is very important to give children and young people security in their future.

The Ofsted report on the impact of virtual schools on the educational progress of looked after children published in October 2012, found that:

- Most outcomes were improving in the local authorities visited, although performance was variable from year to year. There was little evidence, however, that the gap in attainment between looked after children and other children was narrowing. Progress between Key Stages 3 and 4 was slower than during earlier key stages.
- Corporate parents' depth of engagement with issues relating to the education of looked after children were variable.
- Clearly stated roles and responsibilities for virtual schools were not always evident.
- Data management systems were of variable quality, which meant that some local authorities were not able to monitor and report on the progress of children and young people.
- There was evidence that the virtual school not only made a difference to children's educational progress, but also often enhanced the stability of their placements and had a positive impact upon their emotional well-being.
- The quality of personal education plans was variable.

- Children placed outside of the local authority area were less likely to receive good support from the virtual school.

What are we going to do?

The Virtual School will provide on-going support to children and young people. It:

- Ensures that there is a system to regularly track, monitor and challenge the attendance, attainment and progress of Looked After Children.
- Ensures that each looked after child has a robust and effective personal education plan (PEP).
- Works with schools to improve overall attainment of looked after children by challenging schools to improve the achievement and progress of individual children through good use of the right resources and interventions.
- Works with social workers to improve attendance, attainment and progress of looked after children.
- Ensures looked after children who are educated in schools outside of Central Bedfordshire receive the right support to achieve the best educational outcomes.

A range of different learning opportunities is accessible through the Virtual School to help to re-engage children who have become disengaged from learning in conventional school settings. Ensuring access to the Pupil Premium funding to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the gap between them and their peers.

Monthly joint meetings are held between the Corporate Parenting Service and the Virtual School to review attendance and key issues that could affect academic performance.

Where placement moves are considered, education and the education provision for the child within the new placement will be a key priority and social workers will consult with the Virtual School in order to ensure a smooth transition.

The Support for Success Panel has been operational for 12 months and it tracks and co-ordinates education, training or employment for children and young people in care and for care leavers up to the age of 21.

Independent reviewing officers will ensure that all looked after children have a PEP that supports them in reaching their full potential.

We will offer a range of educational opportunities to children with disabilities to develop their social and educational needs.

Objective 4: Ensuring the physical, emotional and mental wellbeing of our looked after children is good and that they are safe from harm

Why are we going to do this?

For many looked after children the reasons for becoming looked after are complex and the emerging emotional needs are deep-seated. It is therefore important to ensure that children and young people who remain looked after have their needs routinely assessed and responded to as they arise.

- Their experiences prior to becoming looked after could be for a variety of reasons including: low socio-economic status, chaotic parenting, abuse and neglect, the impact of poor parenting due to mental health issues, substance misuse or domestic violence.
- Poor levels of routine health care, for example immunisations (twice as likely to have missed Meningitis C vaccination) and missing out on preventative messages delivered through schools, for example sex and relationships education, healthy eating or basic alcohol and drugs awareness.
- Negative experiences in care, for example poor placement stability or disrupted education, can result in continued disruption to health care (for example access to dental care) unless health services are wrapped around the child.
- Young people living independently are at risk of poor levels of routine health care.
- Looked after children are at much higher risk of early conception and teenage parenthood.
- Nationally, looked after children have higher levels of obesity.

The physical and mental health needs and emotional well-being of looked after children and young people need to be addressed promptly as they enter the care system and continue their journey through care. They need to be supported to build their self-esteem and resilience and their attachment difficulties and emotional/behavioural issues addressed, if they are to be healthy.

What are we going to do?

Each looked after child will have an up to date statutory health assessment, which will be reviewed regularly. The named nurse for looked after children will work closely with the social worker to ensure that the health plan is an integral part of the child's wider care plan, and that the plan is SMART. We will ensure there is a central co-ordination role for the referral to health for looked after children's health assessments and collation of completed health assessments to ensure these are all completed in a timely manner.

We will seek to provide consistent, stable placements for looked after children that promote their resilience and attachment to care givers. We will ensure all looked after children have a regular assessment of their mental health and well-being by completing Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires prior to every health assessment. The findings of this assessment are analysed and services provided in a co-ordinated way to meet any unmet need, including liaison with CAMHS at their weekly consultations held at the Corporate Parenting Service's offices.

Where a placement move is planned or breaks down, the LAC Nurse and the Virtual School will be informed at the earliest opportunity to ensure that Health and Education provisions are not delayed unnecessarily.

We will promote healthy, active lifestyles for our looked after children and care leavers, ensuring they have opportunities to engage in sport and recreational activities.

We will promote sexual health and work proactively with our young people who are pregnant, or are teenage parents in partnership with both internal and external agencies for example Brookes.

The Designated Nurse for Looked After Children will ensure that all children and young people, who are looked after, do have annual health assessments and are provided with appropriate health care and advice appropriate to their age, such as good diet and sexual health advice.

The last statutory health assessment before a child leaves care will include a discussion between the looked after Designated Nurse and the young person. This will cover their overall health needs and future health prognosis, based on the review and assessment of their health chronology. The young people's designated Nurse will also send a 'health passport' for young people to have access to their health information as they make the move to independent living. The Health Passport is designed to give them relevant information, stored in one place, and to make registering with a GP or other health professional easier.

Life story work is critical to the emotional well-being of children and that is why we will make sure that life story work starts when the child or young person is emotionally ready. We will ensure that life story work is undertaken at the earliest opportunity when a child comes into care.

All children aged 11 and above will have a Child Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment completed and this will be reviewed every 6 months or earlier if necessary – any person with medium to high risk will be referred to the Child Sexual Exploitation Panel.

The Children with Disabilities service is working closely with colleagues in CAMHS to ensure that their services are timely and appropriate in meeting their needs.

Disabled children and young people will have increased opportunities for leisure through the 'No Limits' provision.

Objective 5: Listening to and acting on the views of looked after children and young people

Why are we going to do this?

Children have the right to participate in decisions made about them and which affect their lives. For Looked After Children, this right is enshrined in The Children Act, 1989 and also in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The 'Pledge to Looked After Children' makes consultation and participation of looked after children a priority for the Council and its partner agencies. Participation with children and young people and the Council benefits all. Involving children and young people in planning the development of the services helps to promote their resilience and develops self-esteem. This also means the development of services is improved and benefits from the insight and ideas provided by children and young people.

What are we going to do?

Participation does not come easily to all children and young people. Central Bedfordshire Council has an effective Children in Care Council (CiCC), launched in 2008, following recommendations from Care Matters which complements the participation group for Looked After Children and promotes the active involvement of Looked After Children in service planning and delivery.

When a child has difficulty in expressing their views about any decisions being made, they are offered an advocate who supports children and young people to voice their views. We commission advocacy from an independent provider and will ensure that Looked After Children are routinely informed of their right to be supported by the independent advocate. This is available at any time they and their workers, including the Independent Reviewing Officer, feel is necessary during the period they are looked after by Central Bedfordshire Council.

We will use opportunities to listen to the needs of children and young people and to act on them. Independent Reviewing Officers will meet all children who become looked after before their reviews. They will ensure that the views of children and young people are recorded in each review, in between reviews, when their circumstances change and when key decisions need to be made or significant events take place, which leads to a change of Care Plan.

Young Inspectors have been invited to inspect the Corporate Parenting Service in April 2015 and we look forward to their feedback in anticipation of further improvements which can be made.

Bi-monthly Challenge and Review meetings are held where young people (supported by the Children's Participation Worker) hold the Head of Corporate Parenting to account for service delivery.

Supervising managers will carry out bi-monthly observations of direct work being undertaken by a social worker with children and young people.

A steering group is to be established in the near future for children and young people with special educational needs and disability (SEND) which will be securely linked to other groups within CBC (e.g. Children in Care Council).

Objective 6: Supporting our young people through the transition to adulthood

Why are we going to do this?

As a Corporate Parent, we have a responsibility to see our young people safely through the key transition to adulthood, and potentially to services delivered to adults. This includes helping them to find accommodation, employment or further education and training and in some cases support delivered through Adult Social Care or Health Services.

What are we going to do?

A vital part of our role as Corporate Parents is to prepare the children and young people we look after to lead independent lives as adults. We have a duty to ensure these young people develop the necessary life-skills to lead meaningful lives as adults and to have the confidence and resilience to enable them to thrive when they leave care.

The Leaving Care Teams are committed to 'moving on' structure which supports young people in taking steps to promote achieving independence.

This structure for young people aged 16 years or older will be complemented by the rolling-out of a "Passport for Independence" which will confirm that care leavers have the necessary skills to manage living independently. We will ensure that foster carers, providers of semi-independent units or residential care provisions are supporting young people to develop the necessary skills essential to young people for coping on their own, or with minimal supervision, towards the end of their time in care.

We will work in collaboration with Adult Services in planning placements and transitions for looked after young people with disabilities aged 17 plus.

We will ensure that all of our young people are aware of their leaving care entitlements. We will also ensure that young people are aware of universal entitlements, such as college bursaries and welfare benefits and that these have been explained in a meaningful way and recorded in their Pathway Plans.

The Corporate Parenting Operations Group has been set up to resolve system issues that prevent smooth transitions to young adulthood. This will help us to further enhance our links with Housing colleagues to ensure that young people are able to access housing options suitable to them, i.e. council tenancies, tenancy and floating support.

We are setting out the blueprint for the Care Leavers' Hub which will be multi-agency and multi-disciplinary outreach service operating from a central location, providing a drop-in service for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

We will implement the Pathway for Transitions designed by Prospects (commissioned service by Adult Services) within the Children with Disabilities service.

Objective 7: Expectations of Council Officers in discharging their duties as Corporate Parents

Why are we going to do this?

Every Council department has a responsibility to ensure that all staff has an awareness of, and commitment to, the Corporate Parenting Plan. Every Council department will identify ways in which they can ensure they are meeting their Corporate Parenting responsibility through agreed actions. This includes consultation and participation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers. Each department will be held to account for how it has delivered against the Children's Pledge and report on progress and outcomes to the Corporate Parenting Panel in line with the forum's forward plan.

What are we going to do?

We will work with colleagues through joint workshops across Central Bedfordshire Council to encourage them to think about how their teams can act as 'Corporate Parents' to our children and young people.

Our Corporate Parenting Panel will advocate for the needs of children and will act as 'champions' when undertaking council activities, encouraging other members to think about how the implementation of policies and strategies across the wider authority will impact on children and families.

The Corporate Parenting Operations Group will report to the Corporate Parenting Panel in order to raise awareness of particular issues and to be held to account for the delivery of the objectives outlined in this Plan.

For councillors this means:

- Having a clear understanding and awareness of the issues for Looked After Children so that they can ensure that their responsibilities as Corporate Parents are reflected in all aspects of the work of the Council.
- Communication between Councillors and Looked After Children is facilitated to achieve participation and inclusion, so that children and young people have a say in how decisions are made about services and have an opportunity to influence decisions.
- Members are supported by officers to promote partnership working as a prerequisite for delivering effective services to Looked After Children and to ensure that the joint planning and commissioning framework continues to deliver to this agenda.
- The Council provides effective scrutiny of Corporate Parenting duties.

For all staff within Central Bedfordshire, this means:

- Ensuring employee awareness and commitment to the Corporate Parenting Plan.
- Establishing recruitment and employment practices that offer supported work experience, apprenticeships and employment opportunities for young people who are in or have left the Council's care.
- All relevant services promote access for Looked After Children and their carers through both policy and practice.
- Ensuring the commitment to Corporate Parenting is realised through a quality of care and range of opportunities that lead to measurable improvement in the life chances of Looked After Children - enabling them to succeed in line with their peers.

Section Three: Implementation and Monitoring

Corporate Parenting Panel

We have a Corporate Parenting Panel comprising elected members, senior officers, foster carers' representatives, members of the Children in Care Council who consider issues in respect of all children in care and care leavers. The Panel has leading roles in ensuring children and young people are well cared for and safeguarded whilst they remain in the care of Council.

Through our Corporate Parenting Panel, Children's Services is committed to:

- Ensuring that the views of children in care are listened to and reflected in service delivery.
- Ensuring that all elected members and employees of Central Bedfordshire Council understand their Corporate Parenting responsibilities.
- Acting as an advocate to children in care when setting strategic priorities both within the council and in partnership with other organisations.
- Considering the Council's role as a Corporate Parent to Looked After Children, in particular with regard to improving the Health, Education, Employment, Training and Housing outcomes for children looked after by Central Bedfordshire Council.
- Improving outcomes for young people both in care and previously looked after by Central Bedfordshire Council and:
 - Ensuring integrated planning and activity for looked after children;
 - Ensuring the Council actively promotes opportunities for the children in its care.
- Securing effective communication arrangements with the Children in Care Council to ensure the following:
 - That their views are listened to and reflected in service delivery.
 - Monitoring that Central Bedfordshire's Pledge to all children in care is fulfilled.
- Commissioning reports as necessary to ensure that Members of the local authority have the information that will enable them to fulfil their role as Corporate Parents.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Central Bedfordshire's Pledge to Children in Care³

We will try our best to make your time in care safe and enjoyable and give you opportunities to have fun. We will meet your religious and cultural needs and give you opportunities to meet with other people who share your lifestyle.

We will involve you in decisions that are being made about you, help you express your views about things which are important to you and make sure that you know why you are in care.

You will have a named, qualified social worker and an Independent Review Manager and we shall make sure that you know how to contact them.

We will help you to keep Healthy

- We will arrange annual medicals to make sure you are healthy
- We will offer you the opportunity to take part in activities to help you to stay fit and healthy
- We will help you to get the health advice you need, make sure that you have the details for local health services and help you to access them

We will help you to Stay Safe

- We will enable you to stay in contact with family members and friends (if safe to do so) and will include all the details of contact arrangements within your care plan
- You will be able to contact your named worker and have the contact details for that person and their team. Your worker will return your call as soon as they can and if they are not available, we will make sure that a duty worker contacts you
- If you want to sleep over at a friend's house, as long as it is safe, we will not insist that a police check is done
- We will do all we can to keep you safe from bullying

We will help you to be able to Enjoy and Achieve

- We will help you to complete your education; we will not ask you to move schools in year 10 or 11 unless the circumstances are very exceptional and if so, we will help you to do so
- We will encourage and support you to continue with your hobbies and interests

³ This is available in a booklet format that was designed by our Children in Care Council. It is presented in a simple word format in this plan.

- We will organise social events throughout the year so that you can meet up with other children and young people in care and social workers
- We will celebrate your achievements through positive praise from those who work with you and awards ceremonies, and we will highlight your achievements through newsletters
- We will support you to revise for your exams and help you to access higher education

We will help you to be able to make a Positive Contribution

- We will make your Reviews and Care Plans including Pathway Plans clear, include you in discussions and listen to and respect your views
- We will involve children in care in the recruitment and training of social workers so that your experience helps us
- You will be offered the support of an advocate or independent visitor when you initially move to a placement and regularly after that, so that there is someone for you to speak to and help you when you need them
- We will seek your views about our services including through annual questionnaires
- We will develop a Peer Mentoring Scheme to enable children in care and care leavers to talk to each other and to offer support

We will help you to Achieve Economic Well-being

- We will help and support you to move into independence, and teach you the skills you need to make a successful transition
- We will give you opportunities to gain work experience
- We will support you to gain a job or training and ensure that you have an allocated Youth Support Personal Adviser

Central Bedfordshire Council's Pledge to Children in Care will be audited annually and will then report outcomes to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Appendix 2: Charter to Care Leavers



Department
for Education

Care leavers' charter

A Charter is a set of principles and promises. This Charter sets out promises care leavers want the central and local government to make. Promises and principles help in decision making and do not replace laws; they give guidance to show how laws are designed to be interpreted.

The key principles in this Charter will remain constant through any changes in Legislation, Regulation and Guidance. Care leavers urge local authorities to use these principles when they make decisions about young people's lives. The Charter for Care Leavers is designed to raise expectation, aspiration and understanding of what care leavers need and what the government and local authorities should do to be good Corporate Parents.

We Promise:

To respect and honour your identity

- We will support you to discover and to be who you are and honour your unique identity. We will help you develop your own personal beliefs and values and accept your culture and heritage. We will celebrate your identity as an individual, as a member of identity groups and as a valued member of your community. We will value and support important relationships, and help you manage changing relationships or come to terms with loss, trauma or other significant life events. We will support you to express your identity positively to others.

To believe in you

- We will value your strengths, gifts and talents and encourage your aspirations. We will hold a belief in your potential and a vision for your future even if you have lost sight of these yourself. We will help you push aside limiting barriers and encourage and support you to

pursue your goals in whatever ways we can. We will believe in you, celebrate you and affirm you.

To listen to you

- We will take time to listen to you, respect, and strive to understand your point of view. We will place your needs, thoughts and feelings at the heart of all decisions about you, negotiate with you, and show how we have taken these into account. If we don't agree with you we will fully explain why. We will provide easy access to complaint and appeals processes and promote and encourage access to independent advocacy whenever you need it.

To inform you

- We will give you information that you need at every point in your journey, from care to adulthood, presented in a way that you want including information on legal entitlements and the service you can expect to receive from us at different stages in the journey. We will keep information up to date and accurate. We will ensure you know where to get current information once you are no longer in regular touch with leaving care services. We will make clear to you what information about yourself and your time in care you are entitled to see. We will support you to access this when you want it, to manage any feelings that you might have about the information, and to put on record any disagreement with factual content.

To support you

- We will provide any support set out in current Regulations and Guidance and will not unreasonably withhold advice when you are no longer legally entitled to this service. As well as information, advice, practical and financial help we will provide emotional support. We will make sure you do not have to fight for support you are entitled to and we will fight for you if other agencies let you down. We will not punish you if you change your mind about what you want to do. We will continue to care about you even when we are no longer caring for you. We will make it our responsibility to understand your needs. If we can't meet those needs we will try and help you find a service that can. We will help you learn from your mistakes; we will not judge you and we will be here for you no matter how many times you come back for support.

To find you a home

- We will work alongside you to prepare you for your move into independent living only when you are ready. We will help you think about the choices available and to find accommodation that is right

for you. We will do everything we can to ensure you are happy and feel safe when you move to independent living. We recognise that at different times you may need to take a step back and start over again. We will do our best to support you until you are settled in your independent life; we will not judge you for your mistakes or refuse to advise you because you did not listen to us before. We will work proactively with other agencies to help you sustain your home.

To be a lifelong champion

- We will do our best to help you break down barriers encountered when dealing with other agencies. We will work together with the services you need, including housing, benefits, colleges and universities, employment providers and health services to help you establish yourself as an independent individual. We will treat you with courtesy and humanity whatever your age when you return to us for advice or support. We will help you to be the driver of your life and not the passenger. We will point you in a positive direction and journey alongside you at your pace. We will trust and respect you. We will not forget about you. We will remain your supporters in whatever way we can, even when our formal relationship with you has ended.

© Crown copyright 2012



Reference: DFE-04601-2012

Appendix 3: Managing Resources for Children Looked After and Care Leavers Plan

Please see the attached Managing Resources for Children Looked After and Care Leavers Plan

Appendix 4: Sufficiency Plan – matching needs and demands for placement of Children in Care in Central Bedfordshire.

List of related policies and strategies within Central Bedfordshire:

- The Pledge to Children Looked After
- The Charter for Care Leavers
- The Managing Resources for Children Looked After and Care Leavers Plan
- The Annual Report of the Virtual Head Teacher
- The LAC Education Improvement Plan
- The LAC Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service Strategy
- The Annual Report of the independent reviewing officer service
- The Annual Learning from Complaints Report.
- The learning from best practice and research
- Outcomes from internal and external audits and self-assessments of our services.
- The direct voices of the children and young people in our care
- The Corporate Plan
- Children and Young People's Plan
- Education Vision
- CBC LSCB Business Plan
- Housing Needs Strategy
- JSNA
- BCCG LAC Strategy



A great place to live and work

Contact us:

by telephone: 0300 300 6120

by email: admin.lac&laac@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

on the web: www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Write to the Corporate Parenting Service at: Unit 16, Stephenson Court, Fraser Road, Priory Business Park, Bedford, MK44 3WJ

This page is intentionally left blank

Appendix 3

Corporate Parenting Action Plan 2014 – 2017

Action	Lead officers	Year
Objective 1: Supporting families to stay together where it is safe to do so by managing risk and children at the edge of care		
1.1	Early Help Offer. Appropriate Interventions including Family Support Work, work with Children & YP in households with DV, Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Misuse, Delivery of Freedom Programme and benefits awareness support	Head of Early Help Review yearly
1.2	Locality Family Support teams work intensively to strengthen families whilst safeguarding children. They provide intensive interventions with local stakeholders to provide packages of support to prevent children entering care whilst promoting their safety and development at home	Head of Family Support Year 1-3
1.3	Robust management of the FIS and FAST service to ensure families are receiving the right level of service at the right time	Head of Referral and Assessment Year 1-3
1.4	Provide a range of interventions through the agreed Hub and Spoke Model for disabled children and their families	Head of Children with Disabilities Year 1-3
Objective 2: Delivery of sufficient good quality and affordable placements and permanence options for children who come into our care		
2.1	Delivery of the Sufficiency Strategy	Head of Commissioning Year 1-3
2.2	IROs to monitor the quality of placement in meeting the needs of children and young people as part of the LAC review process. Where there are concerns regarding the sufficiency and/or quality of placements, escalation processes will be deployed	Head of Professional Standards Year 1
2.3	Recruitment of in-house foster carers to be reviewed annually	Head of Corporate Parenting Year 1-3
2.4	Undertake a focused exercise on the future capacity needed of in house residential	Head of Children Year 1-2

Action		Lead officers	Year
	placements for children with disabilities	with Disabilities	
Objective 3: Ensuring all looked after children achieve their full potential in education, employment and training			
3.1	IROs to ensure all looked after children have a PEP that supports them in reaching their full potential	Head of Professional Standards	Year 1
3.2	In conjunction with the Virtual School, the Corporate Parenting Service holds fortnightly joint meeting to review PEPs	Head of Corporate Parenting	Year 1
3.3	The Support for Success Panel will track and coordinate education, training or employment up to age 21	Head of Corporate Parenting	Year 1-2
3.4	Offer a range of experiences which support the learning needs of children with disabilities	Head of Children with Disabilities	Year 1-2
Objective 4: Ensuring the physical, emotional and mental wellbeing of our looked after children is good and that they are safe from harm			
4.1	IROs to ensure that looked after children who are at risk of CSE, who go missing or are placed out of the council area are risk assessed, have a care plan which includes provision to keep them safe and that protective action is taken to reduce their vulnerability	Head of Professional Standards	Year 1
4.2	100% completion target for SDQs and achieving our target of an SDQ score of 13	Head of Corporate Parenting	Annually
4.3	Weekly CAMHS consultation		
4.4	Clinical Psychologist to be appointed by February 2015 to support in-house foster carers so that the children's emotional needs are better met		Year 1

Action		Lead officers	Year
4.5	All children aged 11 and above will have a CSE risk assessment completed and this to be reviewed every 6 months		Year 1
4.6	Missing Children from Care procedure is adhered to and appropriate action to safeguard a child.		Annually
4.7	Manager attends both the CSE and Missing Children from Care Panels		Annually
4.8	Work with colleagues in CAMHS to ensure that their services are timely and appropriate in meeting needs.	Head of Children with Disabilities	Year 1-2
4.9	Ensure disabled children and young people have increased opportunities for leisure through the 'No Limits provision'		Year 2
Objective 5: Listening to and acting on the views of looked after children and young people			
5.1	IROs to meet with all children who become looked after before their first review	Head of Professional Standards	Year 1-3
5.2	IROs to ensure that the views of children and young people are recorded in each review		On-going
5.3	IROs to gather the views of children and young people between reviews when their circumstances change, key decisions need to be made or significant events take place which lead to a change of care plan		On-going
5.4	Young Inspectors have been invited to inspect the Corporate Parenting Service in April 2015	Head of Corporate Parenting	Year 2
5.5	Bi-monthly Challenge and Review Meetings where young people [supported by the Children's Participation Worker] hold the Head of Corporate Parenting to account for service delivery. Minutes of meetings will be kept by CiCC		Year 1
5.6	Supervising manager will carry out bi-monthly observation where allocated worker undertakes direct work with children and young people		Year 1
5.7	Establish a steering group for children and young people with SEND and secure the		Head of Children

Action		Lead officers	Year
	links with other CBC forum (e.g. CICC)	with Disabilities	
Objective 6: Supporting our young people through the transition to independent living			
6.1	Implement the pathway designed by Prospects in response to a commission from adult services	Head of Children with Disabilities	Year 1-2
6.2	Set up the Senior Officers Operational Group to resolve system issues that prevent a smooth transition to young adulthood	Head of Corporate Parenting	Year 1
6.3	Setting out the blueprint for the Care Leavers' Hub, which will be multi-agency and multi-disciplinary		Year 2
Objective 7: Expectations of County Council Officers in discharging their duties as Corporate Parents			
7.1	Setting up the Senior Officers Operational Group. It reports to the Corporate Parenting Panel 6-monthly	Head of Corporate Parenting	Year 1
7.2	Raising awareness of the role of both the parents, children and young people's fora across the Council	Head of Children with Disabilities	Year 1-2

Appendix 4

**Central Bedfordshire Council
Sufficiency Plan**

2014-15

Contents

- 1. Executive Summary**
- 2. Introduction**
- 3. Demographics of Central Bedfordshire**
- 4. Children in Care population**
- 5. Placement Provision**
- 6. Views of Children and Young People**
- 7. Managing demand**
- 8. Ensuring services match the needs of children**
- 9. How the Council will commission placements to meet identified needs**
- 10. Future commissioning intentions**
- 11. Key Impact Measures for Placements Action Plan**

Appendix A - Demographics of Central Bedfordshire Council

Appendix B – Characteristics of Children in Care

Appendix C - Market Analysis

Appendix D – Fee Based Scheme

Appendix E – Project Plan

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Each Local Authority providing children's services must take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within its area to meet the needs of children that it is looking after and children whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation in the local authority area.

The sufficiency plan forms part of our evidence to demonstrate our commitment to meet our statutory obligation as set out in the Children's Act 2008 to deliver better outcomes for looked after children by having the right placement in the right place and at the right time for children in care, and to address the needs of those at risk of coming into care.

The purpose of the plan is to set out how Central Bedfordshire Council will meet the placement needs of current and future children in care and care leavers by detailing our understanding of current needs and current provision and explains what the Council will do to meet future demand.

This document is a statement of our intention for our children and families but also provides the framework to guide the Council to commission different or additional services to meet the changing placement needs of our LAC population.

Outline

This plan details our understanding of current needs and current provision and explains what the Council will do to meet future demand in a cost effective manner.

The sufficiency plan is structured in three distinct parts:

- What we know about our current children in care
- What we currently provide
- What we will do in the future to meet changing demands.

What we know about our current children in care

As of March 2014, the Council had 273 children in care (CIC). Since 2010 we have seen a 39% increase in our CIC population, with an approximate growth of 13.5% per annum. The increase in growth may be explained by national 'spike' events such as the Baby P case which saw a significant increase in cases of children being taken into care nationally. However with changes in benchmarking and a marked investment in early help and family support services, we anticipate over the coming months for the numbers entering care to not necessarily decrease but to begin to plateau.

Approximately 75% of the children in care population reside within a foster care placement. There is a fairly even proportion of children residing in both placements that are commissioned through the Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) framework (108) and in house provision (100).

5% of the children and young people in care were adopted in 2014. Since 2010 there has been a 150% increase in the number children for whom adoption is the permanency plan. In line with this growth, for the year 2014 – 2015 we expect that we will need to find families for about 20 further children to meet the needs of those where adoption has been assessed as an appropriate course.

Approximately 10% of the CIC population are in residential or secure placements (30). The number of young people in residential provision has grown by approximately 50% since 2010. Qualitative accounts indicate that 100% children feel safe and 75% to 88% feel happy with their current arrangement. Processes are currently been developed to conduct an in depth review of these placements.

5% of the cohort secured semi independent accommodation in the year 2013. The demand for these placements recently outweighed availability but we have addressed this through a framework agreement with local independent providers.

What we currently provide

The Council directly delivers and commissions a variety of services that aims to minimise children coming into the care system and to address the needs of those in care.

There are a variety of services which manage and mitigate against risks posed to children and families including the Locality Based teams. Services also work closely with those in care to improve outcomes such as the Looked After Children's Team, Fostering and Adoption Team, the Leaving and After Care Team and the Children with Disabilities Team. Outcomes achieved directly by these teams and their partners are highlighted within the sufficiency document.

A range of commissioned services also work closely with young people and families at risk and provide services to those with emerging and complex needs. This includes accommodation provision and a range of early intervention, social and health care services.

There are also a number of ways in which the Council works to ensure that all services provided are focussed on the individual needs of the child by streamlining care planning processes and regularly reviewing this process with use of IRO's and by utilising expertise at panels to ensure that care thresholds are met and that the right resources are allocated at the right time. A robust quality assurance framework is in place to assure the quality of work undertaken and lastly by ensuring the experiences of the young person are taken into account throughout their time in care.

The need to minimise children coming into care is also strongly recognised. The Councils' Early Help offer takes account of best practice nationally (Allen, 2011;

Munro, 2011) by identifying children and families who would benefit from early help and by having collaborative arrangements in place to provide a co-ordinated assessment and response to prevent abuse and neglect, improve outcomes for children and young people, avoid repeat entries into care or to support young people to return safely to their families in a timely manner. Local evidence indicates positive outcomes. For example, local data highlights that approximately 68% of children and families receiving support through the Early Help Offer achieved their intended outcome and therefore did not require high expense specialist resources.

What we will do in the future to meet changing demands

The plan provides detail of how we will meet our sufficiency duty. It is recognised within it that the approach to meeting demand needs to be flexible and allow the opportunity to respond to changes in demand.

Fostering and adoption are the preferred placement option for children and young people coming into care. In line with the continued and anticipated demand for this placement resource, the Council introduced a fee based scheme in April 2014 to improve rewards to in-house carers. As part of this activity, the Council intend to increase the provision of in-house placements and reduce the use of IFA placements by 25 over the next two years. It is expected that this initiative will have financial implications which will be set against savings made from a dis-investment in the use of independent agencies.

To maximise our potential for recruiting in houses carers, the Council has also aligned our recruitment activity to evidence from research about effective recruitment and applied this knowledge in practice within our marketing campaigns. An initial review of the effectiveness of this activity has already indicated positive outcomes.

We will provide training and support to our foster carers so that they have the right skills, qualities and confidence to be able to meet the needs of any children or young people placed with them including managing the needs of those who

historically the Council have found hard to place, including children with disabilities and adolescents.

Taking into account the demand for residential provision we have started the process of re-commissioning residential home within Central Bedfordshire. This approach takes into account young peoples views, is likely to save at least £396 per child per week, will allow young people increased contact with their families (where assessed as appropriate), continuity of education and allow on going access to local services.

To meet the increased demand for adoption placements, we intend to identify and approve 20 additional adoption household by the year 2014 – 2015. The Council are on target to meet this and we will continue to align our recruitment strategy to the proposals with the national adoption reform.

We will secure semi independent accommodation for approximately 12 care leavers per annum. The Council has commenced activity to address the current shortage of this provision by encouraging providers to consider offering various stages of accommodation and support to care leavers. We introduced a framework agreement on the 30th June to increase capacity, improve the quality of accommodation and to improve transitions arrangements. Young people have been actively encouraged to assist in the development of the specification and their views and expectations of leaving and aftercare accommodations have been sought.

At present it is clear that we need to secure high quality places to meet the increasing demand for places within a 20 miles radius of children's homes. As part of this strategy we have commenced reviewing cases where young people (19) are placed beyond this radius and if it is assessed as appropriate to do so, the Council will commence transition planning to bring these young people back to the local area. This work will be completed in conjunction with relevant partners (i.e. social care, CCG).

The Council is committed to ensuring all young people are placed in high quality provision and in line with this, we will enhance our quality assurance processes by investing in additional resources to quality assure these placements.

2. INTRODUCTION

Councils are required to take steps to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for children in care within their local area. The statutory guidance is explicit in placing a duty on Local Authorities to act strategically to address gaps in provision by ensuring that they include, in relevant commissioning strategies, their plans for meeting the sufficiency duty.

This plan is set within the context of national policy, legislation and guidance.

The Children Act 2008 defines sufficiency as, *“a whole system approach which delivers early intervention and preventative work to help support children and their families where possible, as well as providing better services for children if they do become looked after. For those who are looked after, Local Authorities and their Children’s Trust partners should seek to secure a number of providers and a range of services, with the aim of meeting the wide-ranging needs of looked after children and young people within their local area.”*¹

This plan addresses the needs of children and young people from birth to the age of 21 or to the age of 25 where children’s services continue to have statutory responsibility. This includes children and young people with disabilities who are, or who may be, accommodated by Central Bedfordshire Council. The sufficiency plan furthermore meets the requirements of the sufficiency duty by collating needs, resource information and analysing the market in conjunction with describing what needs to happen in relation to working with children in care or children at risk of coming into care.

The scope of our sufficiency duty is however, not restricted to just making good quality placements. The intention is to co-ordinate a range of activity across Children’s Services. This includes a clear focus on supporting families to stay

¹ Children and Young Person’s Act 2008. Available at <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/pdfs/2008-children-young-persons-act.pdf>

together, wherever it is safe to do so; thus minimising the need for children to come into care, or supporting their timely return to their families.

The ongoing pressure on Councils' and partners' resources means that the focus on efficiency and value for money will be stronger than ever. The challenge for the future is therefore to sustain or improve service quality whilst achieving good outcomes for service users.

3. DEMOGRAPHICS OF CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE

Current demographics

Central Bedfordshire, a mainly rural location, is home to about 260,000 residents; an increase of 11% since 2001. Central Bedfordshire has a growing and ageing population which is expected to increase to 274,400 by 2016.

In 2011 census data indicated that whilst the majority of the population were aged between 16-64 years (approx. 65%), those under 19 years of age comprised of less than 25% of the population. Out of these, 6.2% were aged 0-4 years, 5.9% were aged 5-9 years, 6.1% were aged 10-14 years and 6% were aged 15 – 19 years.

In 2011 an estimated 10% of people in Central Bedfordshire were from ethnic minority communities compared to 20% in England. The largest of these groups are Asian (3.2%); White Other (2.8%); Black (1.4%); and White Irish (1.2%).

The social, economic and environmental circumstances in which people live impact significantly on their health and well-being. Overall, levels of deprivation in Central Bedfordshire are relatively low. However, when deprivation is assessed for the small areas known as Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs), three LSOAs are in the most deprived 10-20% in England. These are within Dunstable, Parkside and Houghton Hall. A further six LSOAs are in the most deprived 20-30% in England. These areas are named as Parkside, Leighton Buzzard North, Tithe Farm, Dunstable Northfields, Sandy and Flitwick.

The Income Deprivation Index (IDACI) can be used as a tool to look at the proportion of children aged 0-15 living in income deprived households. This is defined as households that receive work related benefits or where income is below 60% of the national median. The table below shows those LSOAs in Central Bedfordshire that are regarded as the 30% most deprived in It also shows the proportion of children living in income deprived households in that LSOA.

Table 1: Percentage of children in income deprived households (IDACI) with Central Bedfordshire (JSNA, 2013)

LSOA	Percentage
Manshead 594	46%
Houghton Hall 508	41%
Houghton Hall/Tithe farm 618	41%
Parkside 601	37%
Leighton Buzzard North 609	36%
Sandy 433	34%
Leighton Buzzard North/ Linslade 557	34%
Parkside 602	32%
Tithe Farm 619	32%
Dunstable Northfields 596	31%
Dunstable Northfields 595	30%
Flitwick	29%
Dunstable Northfields 599	27%
Caddington 562	27%

Projected demographics

It is projected that an additional 1,200 (2%) children will be living in Central Bedfordshire by 2016. The main drivers of the rising population are increasing life expectancy, a rising birth rate and inward migration. There are significantly more births in Central Bedfordshire than deaths. A net migration due to more people arriving than in the area than moving away also contributes to the rising growth.

Based upon demographic evidence of an increasing population within Central Bedfordshire across most of the age ranges (outlined in Table 2) and taking into account the national trends in vulnerable families requiring support, the Council will need to plan for a growth in the number of children who will require preventative services, and possibly who will come into the care system.

At present we are particularly aware of an upward trend in the population of pre school primary aged children which has both been noted as a trend locally and nationally. This upward trend is predicted to continue. Central Bedfordshire is

also a growth area in terms of housing, with an average of 1,771 new homes expected to be completed each year over the next five years. Within Central Bedfordshire, as at January 2013, the 130 mainstream schools (excluding nurseries) catered for a pupil population of approximately 37,500 pupils aged 4plus to 18plus. For example, we anticipate that universal educational provision will rise by 7,500 in the coming years - from approximately 37,500 pupils in 2013 to just fewer than 45,000 pupils in 2018.

Any future services delivered by the Council will therefore need to be flexible and responsive enough to manage this demand and the growth in populations, or to mitigate against it, with the development of preventative services.

Table 2: Growth in 0-19 population from 2011/12 with projections through to 2021

Population (0-19)		Projection data	
Age range	2011/12	2016	2021
0-4 years	16,115	17,750	17,875
5-9 years	15,000	16,795	18,470
10-14 years	15,430	15,190	17,065
15-19 years	15,575	14,460	14,490

Appendix A provides further information on demographic figures and trends.

4. CHILDREN IN CARE POPULATION

Current Children in Care population

The number of children in care (CIC) in Central Bedfordshire has increased since 2010. This is illustrated in table 3 below.

Table 3: Children in Care in Central Bedfordshire

Total CIC	March 2010	March 2011	March 2012	March 2013	March 2014
Central Bedfordshire (Children In Care)	165	175	210	245	273
Central Bedfordshire Rate per 10,000	29.0	31.0	37.2	42.8	46
Statistical Neighbour ² Average (rate per 10, 000)	44.6	46.0	45.4	43.0	42.7
National Average (rate per 10, 000k)	58.0	59.0	60.7	59.6	60.0*

* Publication released by DfE on 30 September

The table above shows that in 2010 Central Bedfordshire had very low numbers of children in care, compared to for example, our statistical neighbours and national averages. However the numbers coming into care steadily increased from 2010, representing approximately a growth in this population of 13% per annum.

Trends in relation to our Looked After Children's population show that children aged 0-4 years are most likely to enter the care system and also to be discharged from it. This would indicate an increasing need for short term intensive interventions to address the needs of this cohort. Appendix B includes a detailed breakdown of the characteristics of the Central Bedfordshire children in care population.

² Statistical neighbours are Bracknell Forest, Cheshire East, Essex, Hampshire Leicestershire, South Gloucestershire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire, West Berkshire and West Sussex. Drawn from DFE Publication released September 2010.

Projected children in care population

Based on the known demographic growth of children in care as outlined in Table 3, it is expected that the number of children in care will increase. Figure 1 and table 4 below illustrate what the Council predict will be the projected increase in cases of children in care over the next 12 months based on the current rate of growth. Through benchmarking thresholds for entering care and comparing against best practice across the country, the Council has now established practices which it is anticipated will plateau the numbers entering care whilst also ensuring the number of children entering care remains appropriate. This is illustrated in Figure 1 and Table 4 below.

Figure 1: Illustration of projected increase within CBC using local and national rate per 10,000 of the population

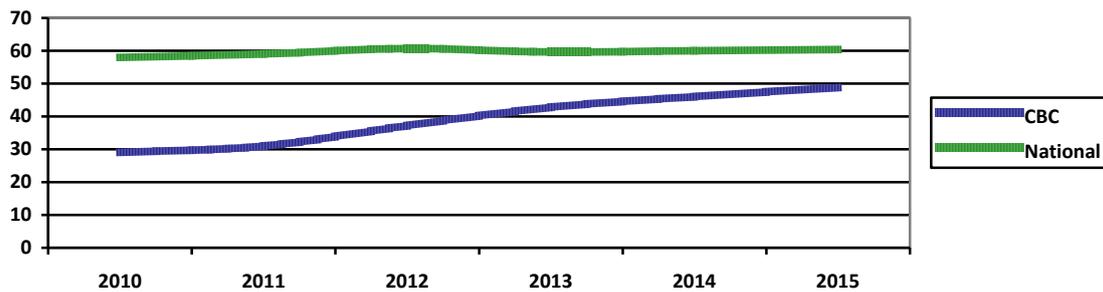


Table 4: Projected Children in Care population

	March 2013	March 2014	March 2015*
Central Bedfordshire population (0-17 year olds)	57,300	57,700	59,385
Central Bedfordshire (Children In Care)	245	273	290**
Central Bedfordshire Rate per 10k	42.8	46	48.8***
Statistical Neighbour Average (rate per 10k)	43.0	42.7	41.8***
National Average (rate per 10 k)	59.6	60.0	60.4

*Represents mean % increase from March 2010 – March 2014. Currently 13.5%.

** Due to new processes implemented and investment in early help and family support services, the Council anticipate the rate of increase in 2014/15 will be approximately 6%.

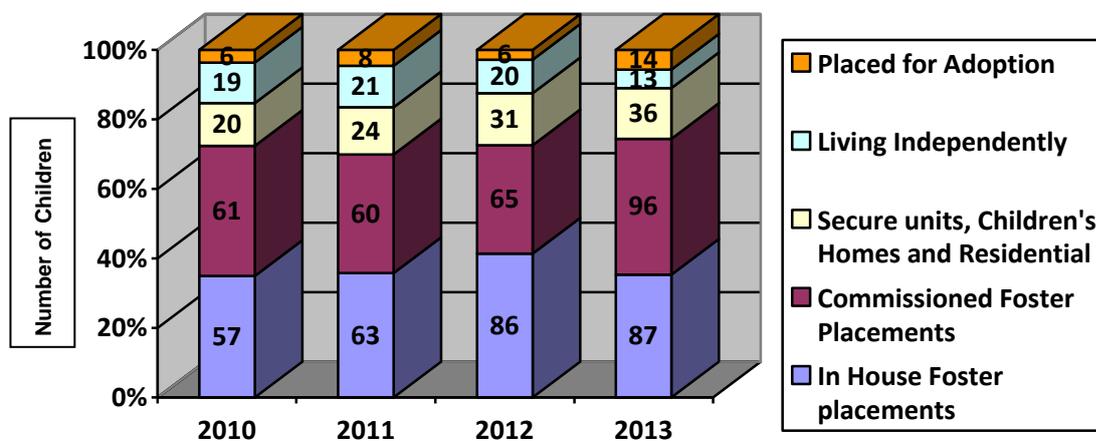
***These figures are an estimation only and have been drawn from previous trends by the author of the plan

5. PLACEMENT PROVISION

Current Placement Mix and Cost

As of March 2014 the Council had 273 children placed in care. Table 5 below shows the breakdown of where children are currently placed and shows the increase in demand since 2010.

Table 5 – Historic information relating to children in care by placement type



The table confirms that in line with best practice the Council consistently tries to place children with suitable foster carers first, and will only look to commission external providers after all in-house options have been exhausted.

a) In-House Fostering

The Council is committed to the use of fostering as a first option for children and young people who come into the care system. This option allows us to minimise overall placement costs, reduces the risk of placement moves, to maximise the outcome potential for young people and reduce overall placement costs. For

example, research indicates that foster care may even be a protective factor against the negative consequences of maltreatment.³

Foster placements can be sourced from:

- The child's existing network
- Foster Carers previously approved by the Local Authority
- Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's)

All three of the above options may provide a placement in or near the young person's home community, though this is not guaranteed.

When a child becomes looked-after or there is a plan to do so, full exploration is made of Family and Friends (otherwise termed as *Connected Persons*), to ascertain if the child can be safely and suitably placed with a Connected Person.

Fostering continues to be a mixed market, with a continued dependency on IFA's providing some of the placements we require. In March 2013 there were 87 (48%) young people placed with in-house carers (which include Connected Persons approved as foster carers), in comparison to 96 (52%) young people placed with IFA carers. As of the 31st March 2014, these figures remain somewhat balanced with 108 young people in commissioned provision as opposed to 100 young people residing with in-house carers or family or friends. The Council will continue work to drive down the ratio of in-house placements to IFA placements so that in the future the majority are in-house or provision provided by family or friends. This should also significantly reduce associated costs as a review of financial information indicates that the average cost of an individual placement (including with family or friends) is £160 per week as opposed to £776 for an externally commissioned placement. Reducing external

³ Horwitz, S., Balestracci, K., and Simms, M. (2001) Foster care placement improves children's functioning. *Archives of Paediatric Adolescent Medicine*, 155, 1235–60.

placements by 10% alone could therefore result in an approximate saving of £320,000 per annum.

b.) External Fostering – IFA framework

During 2010-11 Central Bedfordshire Council joined in partnership with Luton Borough Council and Bedford Borough Council to develop a Framework Agreement for the provision of independent fostering agency placements. It was recognised by the partners that a more systematic and holistic approach was required to provide a consistent quality assurance framework, to reduce negotiation times and to provide a better understanding of and control over the pricing structures of placements.

The contract commenced on 1 November 2011 by tendering a framework agreement with 18 independent fostering agencies. Since its implementation the framework has resulted in both an improvement in the quality of provision and a reduction in the costs of placements.

For example as at the 31st March 2014 out of the 108 young people with Independent Fostering agencies, 90% were with agencies aligned to the IFA framework provision. The approximate cost of these placements was £776 per week per child. In comparison, there were 10 young people in non IFA framework provision at an approximate cost of £904 per week. If all young people therefore were within the framework, this would equate to a savings of approximately £1,607 per week and £86,840 per annum.

b) Adoption

In 2012 the government launched a national adoption reform plan. These regulations are now in effect. As part of these reforms there is now more of an emphasis on improving timescales for both children and adopters by streamlining the process and ensuring there is a sufficient supply of suitable adoption places to meet the needs of those children where adoption is an appropriate course.

In line with these reforms, the Council has reviewed its own internal processes to reduce timescales. We have also explored methods for increasing the number of adoption places available and for reducing disengagement throughout the recruitment phase of the process.

The adoption team are currently supporting 15 families who have children living with them who have been placed for adoption, but where the formal adoption order has not yet been made. For the year 2014 – 2015, we expect that we will need to find additional adoption households families for around 20 further children.

A recent large scale study (Selwyn, 2014⁴) concluded that the proportion of adoptions that disrupt post-order lies between 2% - 9% and that the overall rate is 3.2%. Factors correlated with placement disruption include the length of time the young person has been in care, their age, the complexity of their behaviour problems and the extent of parental rejection they have experienced. Over the last two years the adoptions team have not identified any placement breakdowns specific to Central Bedfordshire children and young people.

The risk of adoption break down will continue to be minimised with the use of a robust matching policy which is aligned to a detailed and responsive adoption support plan. The Council will continue to respond to requests for support from adoptive families in a timely manner and will ensure we retain and develop practitioners with the expertise required to provide direct work to young people and their families. The Council will also continue to organise annual events for adopted children and their families which engage them with the adoption team and provide peer support. These activities are known to be directly correlated with a reduction in the number of families approaching the team at crisis point.

⁴ Selwyn, J. (2014) Beyond the Adoption Order: Challenges, Interventions and Adoption disruption. UK: University of Bristol School for Policy Studies and Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care Studies.

c) Residential Provision

Residential provision is required for children with the most complex needs. Where health and education services are provided in the placement, contributions are received from these agencies. These arrangements are managed through the Joint Allocation Panel.

Where it is identified that the needs of young people can be fully met and managed locally, this is provided by our in-house residential commissioned provision. Currently this is provided by St. Christopher's Fellowship, a charity based organisation. The Service Level Agreement with St. Christopher's Fellowship runs until October 2014. Plans to expand the provision offered with an additional two bedded unit have been implemented. The additional beds are available to both Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council. This action has increased beds available whilst reducing the unit costs of this provision. For example, the unit cost in St. Christopher's Fellowship up to November 1st 2014 was £3,076 in comparison to the new negotiated cost of £1677 per week per unit. This also compares greatly with the cost of an independent specialist provider (excluding health and social care contributions) which approximately cost £3,077 per week (excluding health and social care contributions). The approximate saving per week therefore equate to £1399 per week or £72,748 per young person per annum.

The new service will encompass a therapeutic approach to address the increasing complexity of young people requiring specialist provision within the area and should minimise the need for similar placements (i.e. therapeutic) to be sought out of county.

d) 16+ Accommodation Emergency Provision

The Council routinely analyses the need for 16+ accommodation based on the number and individual needs of children within the care system. This has demonstrated that there is a wide gap in the availability of semi-independent and fully independent accommodation for young people leaving care.

Central Bedfordshire Council, as of the 31st March 2014 had 46 looked after children and care leavers aged 16-17.

- Of these, 39% (n = 18) are looked after under Full Care Orders and will require accommodation until their eighteenth birthday.
- 4 are placed with family and friends and 12 are fostered. These young people may require semi-independent accommodation if they choose not to remain looked after under the Staying Put arrangements.
- 7 are looked after in residential homes/hostels, 12 are in “Independent Living” provision and 5 are Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. These young people are likely to require accommodation.
- 1 is accommodated in residential school settings, and 4 are in short-break residential provision and are therefore unlikely to require this type of provision.

A review of the characteristics of this cohort informs us that any contractors providing these services will also need to take into account the cultural and religious needs of a significant number of service users. It is known for example that whilst 74% of this group were British, 26% were either White Other, Black, Asian or of dual heritage.

A finer analysis of trends informs us that approximately 36 young people aged 16 plus leave care each year within Central Bedfordshire. However local and national trends⁵ indicate that not all of these will require semi-independent accommodation. For example, national trends indicate that 26% of 16 year olds, 39% of 17 year olds and 36% of 18 years old move into semi independent accommodation. We therefore anticipate that approximately 12 care leavers will require semi independent accommodation each year based on current trends.

In 2013 it was recognised that there was a shortage of this form of placement across the area and the Council has since undertaken significant work to address this gap in provision and to improve the quantity and quality of

⁵ Department for Education (2012) *Care leavers in England: Data pack*. UK: DFE.

accommodation for care leavers through use of a framework agreement with semi-independent providers.

A thorough needs analysis was undertaken to develop an accurate picture of this service user group and projected demand for this type of provision. The service specification was grounded in local need and evidence-based practice and 'what works' for care leavers. Providers of semi-independent and supported accommodation were invited to tender against three 'bands' of provision - high, medium and low-needs. This stimulated the provider market within Central Bedfordshire and neighbouring authorities. It will also allow us to contract providers with the highest quality accommodation and support that can be matched to individuals' needs, wishes and feelings in the areas where they feel safe and supported and close to the amenities and opportunities for education, employment and training that will improve their quality of life.

The development of this provision has been closely informed by the young people's views who have been actively engaged in all stages of the commissioning cycle.

Future placement mix and cost

The Council predict there will continue to be a slight increase in numbers of children placed in care up until 2015. This prediction is based upon the known growth of the CIC population within Central Bedfordshire. This is fully outlined within Table 6.

Table 6 shows that we predict there will be a significant decrease in the demand for commissioned foster care placements due to an investment in financial incentives for in house carers. We therefore anticipate that we will need approximately 106 IFA placements as of the end of March 2015.

The number of children placed in secure units, children's homes and hostels remains low (12.5%). As of the 31st March 2014 there were 34 young people residing in residential care which represents 12.5 % of the Looked After Children

population. In terms of placement type as of the 31st March 2014, 73% were recorded as residing in a residential home or unit, 17% were residing in an in-house residential home, 0.05% were listed as residing in a residential school and 0.02% were residing within a medical or nursing home. To minimise the need for residential care as a placement option, the Council will aim to keep the number of young people residing within residential units as low as possible by continuing to intervene early as a means of improving young people’s life chances.

The number of children placed with adoptive parents, or with parents has grown from 6 in 2010, to 15 in 2014. We anticipate that the demand for this placement will further grow to 20 within the next financial year. Further work therefore is planned to increase the amount of suitable adopters available.

Table 6 – Projections of children in care by placement type to 2015.

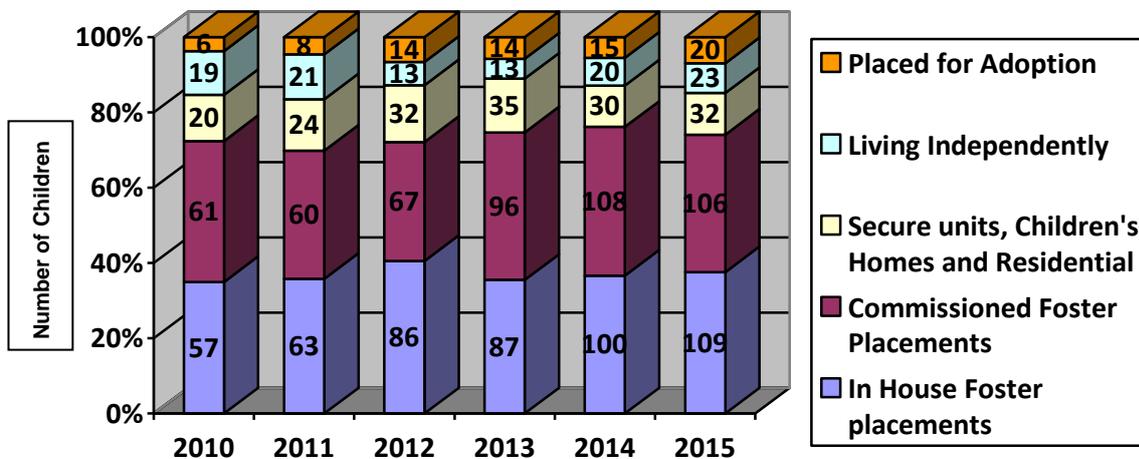


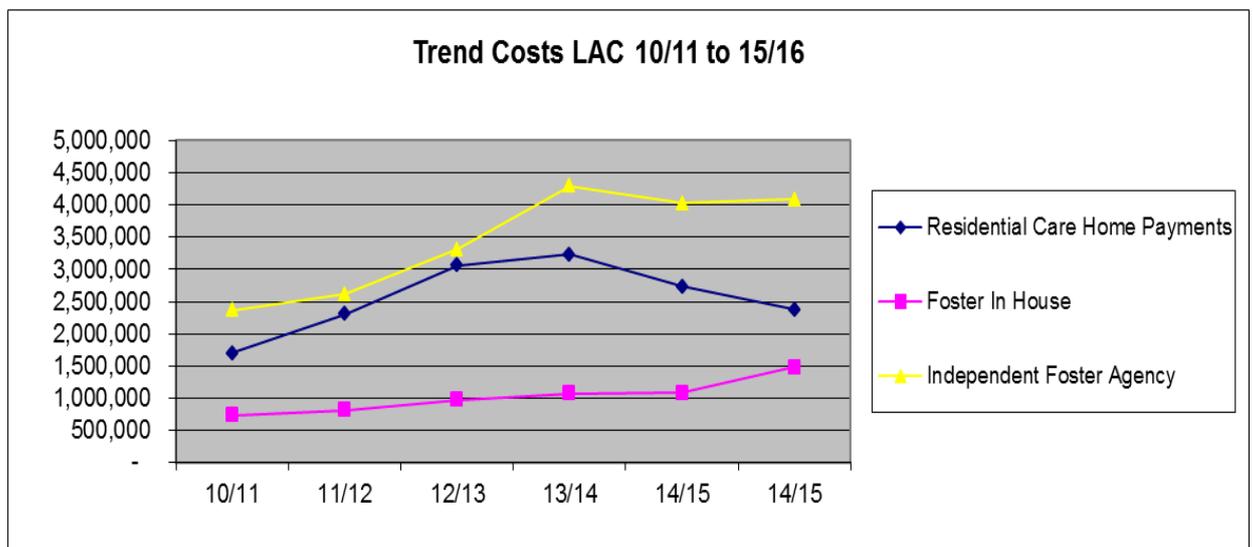
Table 7 outlines what we anticipate will be the predicted cost and the demand for placements if we continue as we are. Based on historic growth and demand for placements, we can predict that foster carer placements will continue to be more frequently required than the other placement options. Locally we anticipate a potential shortage of approximately 7 foster carers in the next year. New processes for attracting in house carers are in place to address this shortage.

Table 7 – Comparative costs of placement types*

Chart	Actual 10/11	Actual 11/12	Actual 12/13	Actual 13/14	Budget 14/15	Budget 15/16
Residential Care Home Payments	1,701,986	2,311,033	3,066,899	3,229,433	2,733,830	2,733,830
Foster In House	736,387	811,852	973,855	1,069,004	1,081,360	1,718,360
Independent Foster Agency	2,364,036	2,611,564	3,307,846	4,293,226	4,030,000	3,312,000

*Assumes implementation Foster Fee Scheme and increased In House placements

Figure 2: Predictive financial trends



6. VIEWS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT CHOICE AND SUFFICIENCY OF PLACEMENT

The Council recognises the need to put children and young people at the heart of all decision making directly related to them, as outlined within the Department of Education (2010) care planning guidance.⁶ In response to this, we ensure that every young person (pending age and understanding) is given the opportunity to express their wishes and feelings, including children with specific needs. Children and young people's views are always discussed with their assigned social worker, recorded and given due consideration before a placement decision is made. It is also collated at every review meeting and at case conferences. The possibilities and options identified are then explained, discussed and, if necessary, reassessed in the light of the child's views.

The Council has a responsibility to try and keep children in their local communities if they cannot live with their family. Children and young people are consulted with, if it is proposed they should be placed outside of the authority. In this instance, the Independent Reviewing Officer is consulted as well as the parents of the child and/ or young person.

If the child or young person is not happy with the decision, the Council ensures they have access to an independent advocacy service to support them. For example, we supported 62 young people to access an independent advocate in the period 2013-14. This represented a 58% increase in the numbers accessing an advocate since 2012/13. This increase is positively correlated with the continuous promotion of the service across the Council.

For further information about the way the Council has agreed to work with Children in Care, please see the Council's [Children in Pledge](#). Primarily this sets out the Council's pledge to children in care and emphasises its commitment to work in partnership with young people when making decisions which impact

⁶ Department for Education (2010) Independent Reviewing Officers Handbook. UK: DFE

upon them and to take necessary actions to enable them to consistently achieve positive outcomes related to their physical, mental and economic wellbeing.

The information outlined above is useful to inform placement decisions. In our last Sufficiency Plan (2012-13) it was recognised that there was a need to embed a more systemic way of collecting the views of children and young people to inform future service design. This work has been undertaken and we have since completed a more in-depth analysis of young peoples' views to ascertain how happy and safe they feel in their current placement and to identify if there are any notable trends which we have used to inform our future commissioning intentions.

In 2013, the Council evaluated, from a young person's perspective, the in-house residential homes (excluding provision for children with disabilities) commissioned by the Council. Getting feedback from young people about the quality of their homes and their outcomes was central to this work. Two in-house homes were visited, and 8 young people were interviewed about being looked after. The views of home managers and care staff were also solicited to provide a 360-degree view of children's care.

Young people reported feeling safe and happy in their homes. They were satisfied with the level of support (both practical and emotional) that they received, and also had good support for their education. 87.5% said their attendance or attainment had improved while in their current placement. On average, a placement in these homes lasted twice as long as a placement with any other residential provision used by the Council, and twice as long as any of the young person's other previous placements.

However, the interviews also spoke revealingly of issues around friendship and transition planning. This replicates trends in the national picture that it is difficult for young people within residential homes to form close friendships with other young people in this setting and often the young people (from a staff perspective) to plan for their life after care. This was largely due to the young

people not been aware of where they may go after they left the provision. It is anticipated that through the leaving and after care framework we now have improved these processes with increased options and an overall awareness of leaving and after care accommodation across the area.

A similar survey of spot-purchased residential provision was completed and included a series of interviews with young people placed out-of-area. All young people reported feeling safe in their homes and 75% said they were happy there. Similar issues with friendships and transition planning emerged as within the in-house provision, with some additional problems around family contact for young people placed a long distance from home.

The views of young people in foster placement are also gained in a range of ways. Independent Reviewing Officers ensure that each young person has an opportunity to talk about their placement and anything they may wish to say. This can be through a one-to-one discussion prior to the review or at the review if the young person is comfortable with that. We also seek written feedback from those placed with foster carers, when foster carers are reviewed annually.

In the coming year we intend to continue to seek young people's views using a range of strategies to ensure all placement decisions take account of their views and wishes and as a means of monitoring the quality of provision on offer.

7. MANAGING DEMAND

The Council directly delivers and commissions a variety of services that aim to minimise the need for children coming into the care system, to improve outcomes for the cohort in care and to return children to their family of origin where assessed as appropriate. Although not specifically linked to sufficiency, it is important to recognise that by acting early and intervening swiftly, many children and families can remain together safely.

Details of the key preventative services are outlined below:

a) Access and Referral Hub

The Access and Referral Hub went live on 1st April 2014. This is a joint enterprise between Social Care and Early Help staff who aim to provide swift proportionate advice and services to the Public and professionals; thereby ensuring there is only one front door. The Hub incorporates other parts of the service and enables easier access to support services for children and families. The Council's approach to MASH development with partners is to incorporate this alongside the already improved access and referral arrangements to all families, children and young people who ask for advice or support. This ensures specialist services such as safeguarding services to children at risk of harm are effectively targeted and that timely and effective early help services are provided to those with emerging problems.

b) Early intervention services

Our commitment to early help is central to our Children and Young People's Plan with 'Early help for all who need it' cutting across our four priority areas:

- Improved educational attainment
- Protecting vulnerable children
- Early help and improving life chances
- Being healthy and positive

Early help supports the broader Council priorities of promoting health and well being and protecting the vulnerable. It additionally offers value for money by working in a preventative way to reduce future spend within specialist services.

Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life, from the foundation years through to teenage years.

Our early help offer recognises the crucial role that all family members (i.e. not just mothers and fathers, but step parents, grandparents, siblings and other extended family members and carers), play in influencing what children experience and achieve as well as the consequences to children when families are in difficulty.

Early help services focus on children, young people and families who may need support either through a single service or through an integrated multi-agency response. They work with families where there are signs that without support a child may not achieve good outcomes and fulfil their potential. However early help services are also critical in preventing escalation into specialist services.

As of the 31st March 2014, there were 1256 referrals for Early Help Assessments. The vast majority of these cases were successfully dealt with within the Early Help arena (approximately 68%). Furthermore 13% (n=171) acted as a step down measure from social care.

Further information about the early help offer provided by the Council can be found at www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/eha.

c) Managing risk within the family/community

The Council has a variety of ways to manage and mitigate against risks posed to children and families. The key services are detailed below:

Intake and Assessment Team

The Council has a statutory requirement to provide a service which receives all contacts and referrals in relation to children and young people.

This team is the point of access for parents, children, professionals and the public who have concerns regarding children. The team undertake a comprehensive assessment should the threshold be met. They also offer professional advice, support and signposting services. Any work with children and families is conducted under Section 17 (child in need), or Section 47 (child or young person is deemed to be at risk of immediate significant harm), as defined in the Children's Act 1989.

If it is assessed that the child or young person is at risk within their family, then a plan is formulated and local and family resources are considered in order to reduce the risk. On rare occasions, children may become Looked After by the local authority under Section 20 of the Children's Act 1989 and court proceedings may be initiated.

Last year there were approximately 2500 referrals to the Intake and Assessment team. Of these, approximately 60% resulted in the provision of social care services (i.e. assessment). The family interventions delivered by these teams furthermore keep the proportion entering care appropriate and ensures children remain safely within their families.

The Locality Family Support Service

The Locality Family Support Service consists of seven teams covering the county and based at the Dunstable and Biggleswade children's services offices. These teams provide a social work service to CBC's most vulnerable families and focus on the following localities:-

Dunstable North & South; Houghton Regis; Leighton Buzzard; Sandy; Biggleswade and Flitwick/Ampthill.

All the children in these families are considered to be in need (Section 17, Children's Act 1989) and a proportion of them are considered to be at risk of harm (Section 47, Children's Act 1989). The teams provide an intensive social work service which supports, challenges and enables families to ensure that the overwhelming majority of children remain at home with their parents with improved levels of parenting and lower levels of harm. The teams also identify families which cannot respond to interventions and whose children therefore require the services of the care system to ensure their safety. The early identification of these children is essential if care planning and service provision are to ensure they have the best possible life chances. The teams work with extended families networks to identify family members who may be able to care for children when their parents are not able to. The teams also work with a number of children and young people with attention deficit and conduct disorders, complex health issues and mental health concerns. Many of the parents have drug and alcohol addictions, mental health problems, learning disabilities and experience domestic violence.

The teams use assessment, planning, timely interventions and regular reviews as a means of change and growth in families. They also work closely with a wide range of internal teams (Family Intervention, FAST) and external partners (Health, Police, Voluntary sector) to address the often complex needs of families.

The Family Intervention Service

The Family Intervention Support Service comprises of three distinct areas of work including the Family Intervention Support Service (FISS), the Family Adolescent and Support Team (FAST) and the Homelessness and Mediation Service (HAMS).

The Family Intervention Support Service (FISS) works with children and families who have complex needs and therefore require either child in need or child protection plans.

This service in 2013/14 worked with 177 families. Of those receiving support, 33% of families achieved all goals agreed, 18% met the payment by results element as set by the Troubled Families criteria and a further 1% achieved sufficient progress to move successfully down into step down services. Work completed by the team and evidence collated by them also enabled social care practitioners to manage safeguarding and benchmarks for care by identifying cases where children should become looked after (n=7).

The Family and Adolescent Support Team (FAST) provide intensive 12 week crisis support and interventions to families with adolescent children to prevent family breakdown.

In 2013-14, the FAST team worked with 88 families. Of those, 74% demonstrated improved outcomes including achieving sufficient progress to move to step down services (n=52), 1% became accommodated (n=7), 5% was safely returned to the family home (n=1) and 5% was supported to access supported lodgings. Feedback regarding the service provided is consistently collected from both parents and young people. A review of this highlights positive experiences of the service

The Homeless and Mediation Service (HAMS) provide advice and guidance to professionals who work with young people identified as being homeless.

In 2013-14, the HAMS service worked with 184 young people. Primary issues related to young people presenting as homeless (n=56), seeking advice (n=38), followed by the need for mediation (n=18) and an emergency crash pad (n=11). Following intervention and appropriate intervention, some outcomes noted included young people returning home (10%), young people securing a hostel (11%) or being supported to remain within the family home (11%).

Children with Disabilities Team

The Children with Disabilities (CWD) Service works with children and young people from birth to 18 years. Direct and indirect work provided by the team aims to support families to carry out their day to day tasks and thereby to enable the child to live with them.

The service supports families through their journey (from assessment to accessing provision and beyond), where threshold criteria's are met. In 2013/14 the CWD team supported 238 children or young people. A range of in-house and external provision is also financed from the service budget to alleviate pressures on families with a disabled child. Within this period all of the disabled children and young people, with the exception of the Looked After Children, in the service were supported through a range of short breaks.

Demand is managed by consistently reviewing a range of data collated on this cohort and through management oversight at panel processes which enables service leads to have an overview of on going need and to plan effectively for addressing the needs of disabled children, young people and their families.

Outcomes within the service are monitored through the Children with Disabilities Panel (CDAP) and through the Joint Allocation Panel (JAP) depending on the complexity of the case and the needs of the child.

The Children with Disabilities Service also operates a separate duty system which ensures access to services is via officers who have the specialist knowledge which other professionals and parents value.

Looked After Children's Team

The Looked After Children's Team works with children whose long-term plan is to be looked after by the Local Authority for the duration of their childhood.

The team is responsible for ensuring that all looked after children are visited, consulted and have robust plans in place to ensure good outcomes. This includes in particular their education, health (including emotional health) and plans about their permanent placement. As appropriate, children are moved into adoption or become subject of special guardianship or residence orders. Many remain in foster care, although for some residential placement is most appropriate. In other circumstances children may return to live with their families.

In 2013/14 the Looked After Children's team worked with 358 young people. The numbers of young people aged 0-12 (n=179) and 13 plus (n=179) supported by the team were evenly proportioned.

Outcomes for the cohort are wide ranging and collected from a range of sources. This includes the percentage of Looked After Children visited within timescales. In 2013/14 100% of children worked with within the team were visited within appropriate timescales.

The Council also recognise that Looked After Children are particularly vulnerable to poor mental well being and therefore continuously monitor this domain allowing for identification and the allocation of appropriate resources to address issues arising. As of March 2014, 100% of our Looked After Children population completed a Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire (SDQ). The average score for the group within the period 2012/13 was 14.2 which would be considered as "borderline" (i.e. have some additional needs).

Evidence indicates that placement stability can also make a positive difference to young peoples' lives, giving them the opportunity to form strong attachments with carers and friends, maximising their resilience, and improving their chances of achieving positive outcomes⁷. As of March 2014, 29% of young people who have been looked after continuously for at least 2.5 years (aged under 16 years) are currently residing in a placement where they have spent at least 2 years.

⁷ Unity, S. (2008) Multiple Placements for Looked After Children. Available at <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2008/10/27/multiple-placements-of-looked-after-children/>

8. ENSURING SERVICES MATCH THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN

The Council and its partners recognise that the children, young people and families we work with present with a wide spectrum of need and that a variety of different responses is therefore required to ensure that all services provided are focussed on the individual needs of the child, young person or the family.

a) Good Care Planning

Revised care planning regulations came into force on 1st April 2011. These support arrangements for robust care planning, placement and case review for children looked after. They also aim to improve the care and support provided to care leavers.

The Conference and Review Service is focussed on the quality of care planning and provides challenge and scrutiny to operational practitioners and managers when gaps in relation to timely and appropriate plans for children have been identified. In addition across Children's Social Care the service has responded to new requirements arising from the Family Justice reforms.

Care planning processes focus robustly on the child. IRO's meet with children before their reviews and care plans set out how all aspects of the child's future placement and support needs are to be met.

The outcomes of health assessments and Personal Education Plans are scrutinised and identified needs responded to in the care plan.

The Council takes positive steps to ensure that looked after children retain contact where appropriate with their birth family. Care plans set out plans for contact between the looked after child and siblings, parents, grandparents and other significant adults in the child's life where it is appropriate to do so.

b) Effective decision making

The Council manages three decision making panels to effectively allocate resources for individual cases. The main remit of these panels is to ensure that care thresholds are met and that the right resources are allocated at the right time. By working effectively the panel aims to improve placement stability by matching needs to appropriate placements.

The Central Bedfordshire Council Resource Panel ensures consistency of practice and decision making across children's social care whilst also ensuring limited resources are managed effectively.

The Joint Allocation Panel has been established to look at requests for provisions where joint funding is requested from Education and/or Health.

Information from both panels is used to inform future commissioning, particularly relating to the sufficiency plan.

c) Quality Assurance framework

Children's Social Care has a Quality Assurance Framework which sets out the activity in relation to compliance and qualitative auditing and improvement measures. The purpose of the Quality Assurance Framework is to:

- improve outcomes for children, young people and their families;
- set practice standards against which the quality of services and their impact be measured;
- ensure that the services provided are of a consistent high standard and sustainable through regular evaluation;
- is both reflective and proactive through the measure of quality and impact of service delivery;
- support the continuous improvement and development of practice;
- influence the development of policies and procedures to support staff in delivering good practice.

The Framework sets out measures by which practice can be evaluated through the audit function and practice standards for practitioners.

Child Protection Conference Chairs and Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) play a key role assuring the impact and quality of work undertaken by Children's Social Care, ensuring that performance indicators and procedural requirements are met, and that plans set out for children and young people are outcomes based and meet the specific needs of the child/young person.

The Quality Assurance Framework within Children's Social Care, is also linked to Bedfordshire's Safeguarding Children's Board Performance Framework.

d) Dispute Resolution Process (DRP)

The IRO has a duty to monitor the Local Authority's performance overall, not just in respect of the review of the child/young person's case. IRO should identify poor practice, and must negotiate with the Local Authority's managers up to the highest level. The IRO is required to consider a referral to the Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service, where the child/young person's human rights have not been observed.

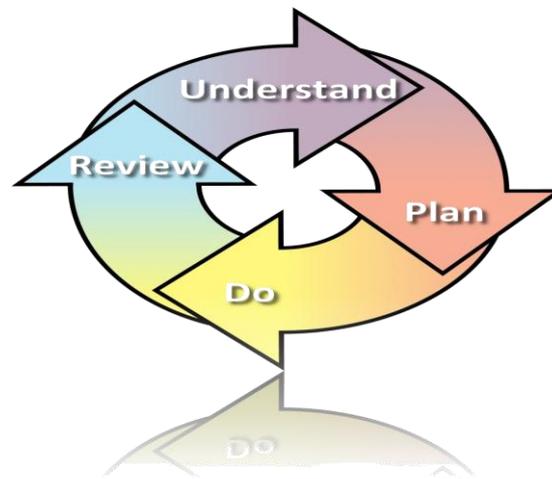
The DRP allows IROs to resolve concerns and disputes at the very earliest opportunity through a process of escalation to the Team Manager and if necessary the Head of Service.

Most other concerns will be raised with the Team Manager through the existing Quality Assurance process. A 'RAG system' is now in place and ensuring that more urgent or serious matters are highlighted. Most concerns are resolved through quality assurance process.

9. HOW THE COUNCIL WILL COMMISSION PLACEMENTS TO MEET IDENTIFIED NEEDS

All commissioning will be managed consistently in line with Central Bedfordshire's Children's Services Commissioning Framework using the commissioning cycle illustrated below.

Figure 1: Commissioning Cycle



The Council will commission and deliver services based on five principles.

- a) Our processes will be transparent, fair, collaborative and consistent
- b) We will demonstrate value for money, efficiency and better outcomes for our customers and communities
- c) We will have the right service providers
- d) Children, Young People and families will be involved in everything we do
- e) We will continue to learn and improve alongside our providers

The Council's commissioning team work closely with social workers and other colleagues to ensure that the needs of the child inform what services are provided for them.

The commissioning team also analyse the effectiveness of different types of intervention and placement provision to understand how best to meet children's

needs. This will include on going review of current provision to ensure it remains fit for purpose and ensuring that providers of all placements use all resources available to them to improve children's social, physical and educational outcomes.

10. FUTURE COMMISSIONING INTENTIONS AND DEVELOPMENTS

The Council recognises the need to constantly review the supply of appropriate places for children. The demand for placements changes constantly and therefore it is vital that the Council's commissioning approach is flexible and allows the opportunity to respond to changes in demand.

At present it is clear that the Council needs to:

- Explore methods to increase the recruitment of in-house foster carers by a minimum of 10% over the next 12 months
- Identify and approve 20 additional adoption household by the year 2014-15
- Re-commission existing specialist residential placements within the local area
- Secure semi independent accommodation for approximately 12 care leavers per annum
- Increase the amount of high quality places to meet the increasing demand for places within 20 miles⁸ of children's homes.
- Ensuring the quality and safeguarding standards within residential provision remains high

The Council's overarching intention is to continue to collaborate with a range of providers to secure the broadest range of placements possible in the most effective and cost efficient way to meet the needs of our children in care.

In line with the needs identified, more specifically we will either develop or commission the following services:

i. Increasing the recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers

In line with the national picture, the Council will continue its efforts to seek to recruit a wider pool of foster carers. We recognise that this pool needs to be

⁸ 20 miles is the statutory measurement of local placements to ensure children stay close to family/friends etc. quote from statutory duty.

representative of the diverse needs and age ranges of children and young people entering care to increase the possibility that we consistently find the right home for each child, without the requirement for additional moves.

From a review of young people currently in foster placements, we know that we need to expand our in-house provision at present by a minimum of 10% to meet the expected demand next year.

We will also draw on evidence from research⁹ about effective recruitment and use this knowledge in practice within our campaigns such as maintaining a consistently high profile and by having ongoing publicity which is pitched at a local level through word of mouth and publicity in local press. We will also ensure our recruitment campaigns are supported by robust systems for following up enquiries in a timely manner to minimise dis-engagement. We will also make use of foster carers own networks to attract potential recruits into the system.

We will continue to provide training and support to our foster carers so that they have the right skills, qualities and confidence to be able to meet the needs of any children or young people placed with them particularly adolescents and children with disabilities.

We will additionally ensure that support continues to be available to foster carers from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and other services as appropriate. This will be further enhanced with a new jointly tendered CAMHS service with Bedfordshire CCG which will have additional capacity to address the needs of this group. The new service is due to commence on the 1st April 2015.

We will continue to make use of independent foster agencies, particularly those providing placements local to Central Bedfordshire, wherever there is not local capacity in-house or where the in-house service is unable to meet the child or young person's specific needs.

⁹ SCIE (2004) SCIE Guide 7: Recruiting Foster Carers. Available at <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/guides/guide07/carers/recruiting/index.asp>

ii. Incentives to attract Foster Carers.

Recruitment of foster carers is an on-going challenge which is further compounded by the discrepancy between financial incentives offered by independent agencies in comparison to incentives offered by the Council.

To ensure we attracted and retained a pool of in-house fosters, the Council reviewed the existing fee based scheme and explored the financial implications alongside the potential benefits of increasing financial rewards to in-house carers.

Following on from this review, in April 2014 the Council introduced a fee based scheme to improve rewards to in-house carers. As part of this activity, the Council hopes to increase the provision of in-house placements and subsequently reduce the use of IFA placements by 25 over two years. It is expected that this initiative will have financial implications (see appendix D) which will be set against savings made from dis-investment in the use of independent agencies.

A full outline of our proposals are set out with Appendix D including anticipated costs of this initiative.

iii. New approaches to attract more adopters

In the year 2014-15 we anticipate the need to find adoption households for around 20 children.

To match this demand the Council aims to increase the amount of adopters within the system to ensure there is a sufficient supply of suitable places to meet the needs of those children where adoption is an appropriate course.

We intend to do this by continuing to align our recruitment strategy to the proposals with the national adoption reform. As part of this strategy we are investing additional resource to ensure applications are completed in a timely manner.

The Council will remain proactive in maintaining contact and providing support to prospective adopters throughout the process and aims to minimise disengagement by having a dedicated individual within the team who will act as the first point of contact but who will also track adopters' progress throughout the application phase.

The Council are confident that procedures currently in operation are working effectively from outcomes achieved in the placement of children and recruitment of adopters within the last 12 months. We therefore remain committed to our current strategy and will continue to implement and review this to enable us to maintain a sufficient supply of suitable places to meet the needs of children where adoption is assessed as appropriate.

iv. Re-commission the current contract of two local residential homes

The current contract for residential homes ends in November 2014. The Council, working collaboratively with Bedford Borough Council are currently in the process of re-commissioning this service to secure improved outcomes for children placed within these homes. Throughout the process we will ensure that any new provider has demonstrable knowledge and experience to assure us that they can consistently provide provision which will meet the new national minimum standards.

The focus for the new management of these two homes is to provide a holistic care offer which ensures positive outcomes for young people and a smooth transition for children from the residential provision into a foster care placement, or into semi independent accommodation as assessed appropriate.

Young people's views have been fully embedded into all aspects of the commissioning of this service. We commenced the commissioning of the new service by evaluating what works well when providing residential care, by exploring young peoples' experiences of the current provision on offer and working collaboratively with social care to identify the requirements for the

future. We have also identified young people to participate in the procurement process thereby supporting us to identify a suitable provider for the future.

v. Semi independent living provision targeted at the needs of our care leavers and in the locations where it is needed.

A review of demand predicts the need for semi independent accommodation for approximately 12 care leavers per annum.

The Council recognised that there was a shortage of high quality places available within the area. Therefore the Council's commissioning team and Social Care worked collaboratively to put a framework agreement in place for the overall intention of ensuring there is sufficient and suitable accommodation available for each young person assessed as suitable for this pathway.

The commissioning team are committed to designing services which embed young peoples' wishes, feelings and their experiences of provision available. Throughout the process the team ensured young people were fully involved in all phases of the commissioning of this provision. For example, the team consulted with young people to help determine what type of accommodation they felt was needed and in which areas and involved care leavers in the tender evaluation process so that their experiences of using this type of provision could shape service development.

Shortlisting for a Framework Agreement is expected to take place in June 2014. As part of this process quality assurance visits to shortlisted providers' units will be carried out in partnership with the Children in Care Council. The contract is expected to be awarded and commence in July 2014.

vi. Increase the amount of high quality places to meet the increasing demand for places within 20 miles¹⁰ of children's homes.

¹⁰ 20 miles is the statutory measurement of local placements to ensure children stay close to family/friends. Drawn from DFE (2010) *Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children*. UK: DFE.

The Council will maintain its commitment to not seeking residential placements for children and young people unless there is no other alternative way to meet their needs. We are aware that there remains a need to develop more placements that can cater for older children, with more complex and challenging needs. For example, we know that male adolescents aged 15 years and above with a disability are more likely to end up in residential care than young females and careful consideration therefore needs to be given to how we will meet their specific needs within our strategic approach.

Central Bedfordshire currently has a good range of residential provision for children with disabilities but where needs cannot be met within this, we will ensure alternative provision is identified which meets the needs of the young person as near to Central Bedfordshire as possible. We will only however choose the option of residential care provision for young people with challenging or significant needs after all other options have been explored and agreement has been reached by members of the local joint allocation panel regarding the most appropriate provision to meet need. We are also aware that there will be a sufficiency issue in the CWD long stay provision in the next 5 years (i.e. the latest admissions to the team are ages 13/14 so will need the provision for some years which will need a focussed piece of work to address.

In placing young people with emotional or behavioural difficulties in residential care, we will also firstly consider our local contract for the provision of residential care which currently is held by St. Christopher's Fellowship.

The Council are aware of the importance of placing children as close to their home as is reasonably possible to minimise disruption to their support networks and education. Currently we have a number of children placed outside the area and are currently working towards reviewing all of these cases individually to assess their needs and identify any trends across the group as a means of informing our future commissioning approach.

Our overarching approach is furthermore to make Central Bedfordshire a more attractive place for new providers to provide high quality placements for our children. We intend to achieve this by continuing to sharing intelligence and information about service demand and by working collaboratively with the full breadth of potential providers to explore options for addressing needs arising.

vii. Ensuring standards and safeguarding with residential homes remains a priority

The Council is committed to ensuring all young people are placed in high quality provision which safeguards them from harm and maximises their opportunities. In line with this, we will further enhance our quality assurance processes by investing resources which will enable us to recruit a suitably trained and qualified external individual who can advise us on the on-going quality of homes where young people are placed.

11. GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

This plan will be reviewed through the Children's Services management team.

In 2014, the Council will also consult with young people, providers and partners about updating the Sufficiency Plan to reflect changes in demand and to outline future commissioning intentions.

An overview of the plan will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel for information.

APPENDIX A - DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 1: Census data 2011/12

	Population
2012	260000
2011	254000

Table 2: Age Population Breakdown (2011)

Age	
0 – 15 years	19%
16 – 64 years	65%
65 +	16%

Table 3: Ethnicity (2011)

Ethnic Group	Total	%
English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	228055	89.7%
Irish	3150	1.2%
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	480	0.2%
Other White	7040	2.8%
White and Black Caribbean	1790	0.7%
White and Black African	520	0.2%
White and Asian	1475	0.6%
Other Mixed	1005	0.4%
Indian	2535	1.0%
Pakistani	440	0.2%
Bangladeshi	215	0.1%
Chinese	1405	0.6%
Other Asian	1810	0.7%
Black African	2055	0.8%
Black Caribbean	1230	0.5%
Other Black	330	0.1%
Arab	360	0.1%
Any other ethnic group	500	0.2%

Table 4: 2010 Indices of Deprivation Scores and Ranks Area

ID 2010 Score	National Rank (out of 326)	EoE Rank (out of 47)
10.73	269	34

Table 5: Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index Score (%)

	IDACI
Central Bedfordshire	13%
England (average)	22%

Table 6: CBC Lower Super Output Area's (LSOAs) identified as the most deprived 30% in England

LSOA	
Dunstable Manshead 594	46%
Houghton Hall 580	41%
Houghton Hall / Tithe Farm 618	41%
Parkside 601	37%
Leighton Buzzard North 605	36%
Leighton Buzzard North 609	36%
Sandy 433	34%
Leighton Buzzard North / Linslade 557	34%
Parkside 602	32%
Tithe Farm 619	32%
Dunstable Northfields 596	31%
Dunstable Northfields 595	30%
Flitwick 400	29%
Dunstable Northfields 599	27%
Caddington 562	27%

Detailed information regarding deprivation in Central Bedfordshire can be found:

http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/Images/110405%20ID%202010%20report%20v0_4%20external_tcm6-10073.pdf#False

APPENDIX B – CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN IN CARE AND VULNERABLE GROUPS

a.) Numbers entering care

Table 7: Children in Care

Total CIC	March 2010	March 2011	March 2012	March 2013	March 2014
Central Bedfordshire (Children In Care)	165	175	210	245	268
Central Bedfordshire Rate per 10,000	29.4	31.0	37.2	42.8	46.0
Statistical Neighbour Average (rate per 10, 000)	44.8	46.0	45.4	43.0	42.7*
National Average (rate per 10, 000k)	58.5	59.0	60.7	59.6	60.0*

Table 8a: LAC Admissions by Age Band

Admissions	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
0-4	30	51	67	51
5-11	19	32	31	41
12-16	35	36	24	27
17-18	5	5	3	1
Total	89	124	125	120

Key trend: The number in 5-11 years is increasing. A significant number of those entering care are 0-4 years of age. Overall in the last three years, the number of those entering care has remained stable.

Table 8b: LAC Discharges by Age Band

Discharges	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
0-4	18	17	39	49
5-11	9	14	13	17
12-16	17	27	15	13
17-18	30	37	30	22
Total	74	95	97	101

Key trend: A significant number of those been discharged from care are in the 0-4 range (the average over the 4 years is 36%). There is an indication that the high numbers starting in this age range do not remain looked after long term. The mean number of discharges since 2010 is 92. In comparison the number of those discharged in 2013/14 was 101.

b.) Diversity

Table 9: Diversity of our Children in Care

	On 31/03/2014
White	228 (85.1%)
Mixed	32 (11.9%)
Asian or Asian British	0 (0.0%)
Black or Black British	5 (1.9%)
Other ethnic groups	3 (1.1%)
	Total = 268

c.) Gender

Table 10: Gender of our Children in Care 31/03/2014*

BOYS	2012/13	2013/14	GIRLS	2012/13	2013/14
Under 1:	9	3	Under 1:	13	8
1 - 4:	30	27	1 - 4:	26	29
5 - 9:	34	42	5 - 9:	19	26
10 - 15:	35	49	10 - 15:	33	42
16 - 17:	29	25	16 - 17:	17	17
	Total =				
	137	146		108	Total = 122

d.) Age profile

Table 11: Admissions by Age Group*

Age Profile	2013/14
0-4	51
5-11 years	41
12-16 years	27
17 plus	1
No DOB	0
	Total = 120

* Taken from PIR / LAC admissions table above.

Key trend: Those most vulnerable to entering are those in the 0-4 age range followed by those aged 5 – 11 years of age.

e.) Disabled Children and Young People

As of the 31st March 2014, the Children with Disabilities Team were supporting 16 CBC Looked After Children or young people as a result of their disability on a full time basis. In addition, 222 (excluding LAC) young people were supported with a series of short breaks.

f.) Adoption and Special Guardianship Orders

Table 12: Ceased to be a Child in Care because of Adoption and Special Guardianship Orders 2013/14

Placed for adoption	14
Special Guardianship Order	17

Key note: As of 31st March 2014, 11% of children in care (n = 15) ceased to be a Child in Care because of Special Guardianship Orders and Adoption.

g.) Young People known to the Youth Offending Service (YOS)

The Legal Aid, Sentencing & Punishment of Offenders Act (LASPO) 2012 introduced changes to the remand powers of Courts with a view to achieving a reduction in the numbers of children and young people who are remanded into custody. It also brought about the change of Children in Care (CIC) status for all remanded young people and leaving care status for those who remain in custody for 13 weeks or more as well as the transfer of financial responsibility to local authorities. The policy direction is therefore to manage all young people on remand in the community unless there is a serious concern for public safety.

From April 2013 to March 2014 there was 1 custodial remands, compared to 5 in 2012-13. This placement was in a Secure Training Centre (7 placement days).

h.) Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

Asylum seeking children and young people (UASC) are accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. When the young person leaves care they are entitled to the same leaving care provisions as any other CIC under Section 23 of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

Overall the number of UASC has fallen from a peak of 34 in May 2010. It is however difficult to predict trends in young people arriving in the Council and claiming asylum as it is continuously subject to change. We know that as of the 31.3.14, there were 9 young people residing in semi independent accommodation. Three others young people are either in a foster care placement, a residential placement or residing with family members.

The priority is to ensure this group of young people have placements which meet their assessed needs and offer stability. Leaving and aftercare accommodation will be particularly needed given the current age ranges of this cohort, all of which are aged 17 years and over.

Table 17: Age range of UASC in Care 2013-14

Age	
15 years	0
16 years	5

17 years	2
18 years	4

* In line with the Data Protection Act 2010, data has been suppressed to protect the confidentiality of individuals.

i.) Needs of young people leaving care

Children in Care are significantly more likely to become NEET (not in Education, Employment or Training) and to struggle to secure further and/or higher education opportunities. The Council is working closely with local education and training providers, and other support agencies to develop specific projects to support care leavers.

Table 18: No of 19-21 year old care leavers, with suitable accommodation as of 31.3.14

Age	Mean Average April 2013 - March 2014	Target
19	88%	90%

Table 19: No of 19-21 year old care leavers, in Employment, Education or Training as of 31.3.14

Age	Mean Average April 2013 - March 2014	Target
19	44.8%	65%

As of 31.3.14 there were 88% of all young people Central Bedfordshire were in suitable accommodation. There has been a significant improvement since 2013 in the numbers accessing employment, education or training. This has increased from 44% in March 2013 to 64% in March 2014.

APPENDIX C – MARKET ANALYSIS

Fostering provision: Sufficiency of Provision to Meet Needs Locally

a. In-house foster carers

As of the 31.12.13, the Fostering and Adoption team ceased to be a shared service operating on behalf of both Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council. At this time, there were 165 registered foster carers. This has had a direct impact on the number of foster carers available to Central Bedfordshire.

b. Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs)

Central Bedfordshire has a framework agreement with 18 Independent Fostering Agencies. Other IFAs are used on an ad hoc basis.

Table 20: Breakdown of those within framework agreement including numbers and costs

Number of children placed with Consortium IFAs (as of 31st March 2014) -	99
Average cost of each placement with Consortium IFA	£737
Number of children placed with non framework IFA (as of 31 st March 2014) -	10
Average cost of each placement with non framework IFA	£904

c. Residential Provision

There are 6 Private Children's Residential homes in Central Bedfordshire.

Of those there are two residential children's homes that are used by the Council as 'In-house' placements but which are also shared with a neighbouring authority as part of a joint contract. This contract is held by St. Christopher's fellowship and includes Bunyan Road (6 beds) and Clophill (5 beds). Average occupancy in the period 1.4.13 to the 31.3.14 for Bunyan Road was 80% and for Clophill was 99%. The Council also hold a

separate contract with the provider for a solo bed in Stewartby. Average occupancy for this solo bed throughout the period was 92%.

Table 21: Usage of Private Residential Children’s Homes as of the 31.3.14 outside the area

Placement Location	Number of Placement
Binley Woods, Warwickshire	1
Milton Keynes, Bucks	1
Heckingham, Norfolk	1
Wallasey, Merseyside	1
Peterborough, Cambridgeshire	2
Deal, Kent	1
South Gloucestershire	1
Bedford, Bedfordshire	1
Kettering, Northamptonshire	1
Luton, Bedfordshire	2
Margate, Kent	1
Stafford, Staffordshire	1

d. Residential provision for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

There are two providers which offer accommodation to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. One of these providers (LAMP) is based in Luton and the other (Locate) is based in Peterborough. As of the 31.3.13, there were 8 young people residing in this accommodation.

Other UASC (3) are placed with foster carers, are in residential provision or residing with family members.

e. Children placed in specialist residential with on site education as of the 31.3.14

In the period 1.4.13 to the 31.3.14, there were 3 children residing in residential schools under SEN who are considered LAC.

f. Short Break Provision

Short Break Provision for Children with Disabilities includes Kingfishers and Maythorn. Kingfishers is located in Houghton Regis and comprises of 3 beds whilst Maythorn is located in Biggleswade and comprises of 8 beds.

APPENDIX D – Fee Based Scheme

The current average cost of Independent Fostering providers is £758 per week (£39,387 per year). In contrast, the current average cost of an in-house placement is £420 per week (£21,840 per year). This presents a current cost difference of £338 per week. It is clearly desirable to increase the number of in-house placements and reduce the number of more expensive Independent Fostering placements.

The increased cost of implementing the Fee scheme with current number of in-house placements is £298k. This is cost incurred before any growth in foster placements. The increased cost of a further 10 placements in 2014-15 is an additional £144k. Adding these together, the proposed increase fits within the agreed cost for 2014-15 of £499k.

For the year 2015-16, the increase of a further 15 in-house placements is costed as £218k.

Summary of Planned Increase in In-house Foster Carers (as of 03/14)

- Current number of in-house placements = 100
- 2014-15 planned number of in-house placements = 114
- 2015-16 planned number of in-house placements = 130

It is recognised that foster care provision in Central Bedfordshire will continue to be a mixed market of in-house and IFA placements, to provide an efficient and effective service. We aspire to increase the proportion of in-house fostering provision and reduce the use of IFA placements, in line with our statistical neighbours and preferably trend towards the higher performing local authorities with a significant majority of in-house foster placements.

Details of the Scheme

Tier 0 - Family and Friends carers

This level is intended for those carers who will solely be approved for a specific child or children. Fostering allowances are currently paid at 110% of the Fostering Network recommended rate. This would continue to cover the costs for the child, and would be the payment made to friends and family carers who would not receive the household skills rate (Tiers 1 & 2). Once approved, they will be expected to complete the Training Development Standards, as well as core training such as First Aid, Safeguarding and Safer Caring.

Tier 1 - Mainstream carers

This level applies to mainstream carers who are available for any children the Council may propose to place with them, within their agreed approval range. The expectation is that they show willing to consider placements presented and provide clear reasons for declining placements. They will have completed the Skills to Foster course and a full assessment that has been approved via Fostering panel. A fee of £100 per week on top of the fostering allowance for the child will be paid to newly approved mainstream foster carers for their first year of caring, or until they achieve the Training Support and Development (TSD) mandatory workforce development standards. It is expected that they will make a commitment to completing the TSD within the first year. This replaces the current additional fee of £100 that has been paid to mainstream carers where child placed is 13 or over. This acknowledges that challenging needs are present in all age bands, not just teenagers (excluding Youth Care scheme that caters for additionally complex placement needs, which is dealt with separately). They will also have completed a Personal Development Plan that identifies specific learning and development needs and how these will be accomplished. Carers who cease to meet the standards can also be reduced to a lower tier. The fostering allowance is paid at Fostering Network rates, according to the age bands as published annually.

Tier 2 – Mainstream carers

Carers must have been fostering for two years at Tier 1 before progressing to Tier 2. The fostering allowance is paid at regular Fostering Network rates, according to the age bands as published annually. Carers who cease to meet the standards can be returned to a lower Tier. Carers at this level will also be required to have successfully completed additional core training as defined by the Fostering Service, maintaining an active training profile that reflects on their continuous professional development. The Personal Development Plan will identify specific training expectations that evidence competencies and contribute to the learning of others. Carers at this level will also be sought to contribute to wider aspects of the service such as being Buddy or Mentor to less experienced foster carers and/or contributing to training and recruitment activities. When they reach this competency level, the fee will increase to £175 per week per child placed.

Tier 3 – Mainstream carers – complex needs

This level is currently provided within the Youth Care scheme and a higher fee of £385 is paid to a small number of carers with a commitment to providing maximum occupancy and working with complex and demanding placements that require a higher

level of support and supervision. It is proposed that this scheme is re-evaluated in near future, but for the present is continued as a small cohort and utilised more flexibly with regard to age range of placements. Practice has shown that there are younger children who may well benefit from a specialist placement such as the Youth Care scheme have to offer.

Summary of Fees and Allowances

Age range	Fostering Network baseline	Tier 0 (no fee) Allowance	Tier 1 £100 fee + Allowance	Tier 2 £175 fee + Allowance	Tier 3 £385 fee + Allowance
0 to 4	£140.33	£154.36	£240.33	£315.33	
5 to 10	£159.85	£175.84	£259.85	£334.85	
11 to 15	£199.00	£218.90	£299.00	£374.00	£603.90
16+	£242.08	£266.29	£342.08	£417.08	£651.29

Summary of Benefits of the new Fee scheme

- Be more competitive with neighbours and attract more carers
- Prevent children going to IFA placements and bring those in IFAs back to in-house placements in a planned way
- Incentivise foster carers to complete mandatory training and enable them to feel the council is treating them as paid professional carers
- Prevent loss of existing carers either to competitors or because they can no longer afford to foster
- Encourage foster carers who would otherwise need to work to be more available for fostering at no financial detriment to their household
- Have carers more available to meet the needs of younger children, and potential savings on extra costs such as transport to school
- Increase the provision of in-house placements and reduce the use of IFA placements by 25 over two years

Appendix E

Project Plan

Objective	Method	Responsible party	Timescale
1 Expand our in-house foster provision at present by a minimum of 13% to meet the expected demand next year	Draw on evidence from research about effective recruitment and use this knowledge in practice within our campaigns.	Edward Wong	From April 2014
	Increase the recruitment of in-house foster carers by a minimum of 13% over the next 12 months.	Edward Wong	By 31 st March 2014
	Provide training and support to our foster carers.	Edward Wong Jo Meehan/ Linda Johnstone	Ongoing
	Enhance CAMHS provision to address treatment needs of young people within foster care.	Sharon Simpson (CCG)/ Ben Pearson (CBC)	By 1 st April 2015
	Ensure there is capacity within IFA	Ben Pearson (CBC)	Ongoing

		to meet unmet needs in house and ensure the quality of this provision remains high. Review process	Gerard Jones (CBC)/ Members of CSMT	Ongoing
2	Identify and approve new in house foster carers to meet demand	Introduction of fee based scheme Identification and approval of 25 new in house foster carers. Review process	Gerard Jones (CBC) Edward Wong (CBC) Gerard Jones/ CSMT	April 2014 March 2016 Ongoing
3	Identify and approve new adoption households to meet demand	Align of recruitment strategy to the proposals with the national adoption reform. Identification and approval of 24 new adoption households. Review process	Edward Wong (CBC) Edward Wong (CBC) Gerard Jones/ Members of CSMT	From 1 st July 2013 31 st March 2015 Ongoing
4	Secure improved	Identify demand and needs of	Ben Pearson (CBC)	By April 2014

<p>outcomes for children placed within residential homes locally</p>	<p>service users within current provision</p>		
	<p>Develop new specification for existing service in line with best practice and service users needs</p>	<p>Ben Pearson (CBC)</p>	<p>April 2014</p>
	<p>Re-commission existing service</p>	<p>Ben Pearson (CBC)/ Tara Geere (BBC)/ Linda Sharpstone (CBC)</p>	<p>May 2014</p>
	<p>Reviews outcomes for this cohort</p>	<p>Ben Pearson (CBC)/ Tara Geere (BBC)/ Members of CSMT</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
	<p>Develop specification for new service in line with identified gaps and best practice</p>	<p>Ben Pearson (CBC)/ Linda Sharpstone (CBC)</p>	<p>By Nov 2014</p>
	<p>Commission new service in line with identified gaps in provision</p>	<p>Ben Pearson (CBC)</p>	<p>By April 2014</p>

		Review and monitor outcomes	Ben Pearson (CBC)/ Members of CSMT	Ongoing
5	Ensure there is high quality semi independent accommodation to meet demand	Identify demand and needs of service users within current provision Develop framework agreement for service in line with best practice and service users needs Quality assure all providers within framework Commission service	Ben Pearson (CBC) / Edward Wong (CBC) Ben Pearson (CBC)/ Edward Wong (CBC) Ben Pearson (CBC)/ Edward Wong (CBC) Ben Pearson (CBC)/ Edward Wong (CBC)/ Linda Sharpstone (CBC)	By Feb 2014 By April 2014 By June 2014 By July 2014
		Reviews outcomes	Ben Pearson	Ongoing

6	<p>Increase the amount of high quality places to meet the increasing demand for places within 20 miles ¹¹ of children's homes.</p>	<p>Scoping the needs of all young people in out of county placements alongside relevant partners.</p> <p>Development of template to support decision making process in relation to the needs of young people in out of county placement</p> <p>Conduct review of all cases through JAP panel.</p> <p>Produce report identifying for whom and how needs may be met locally.</p> <p>Put forward and implement plan to</p>	<p>Emma Kilcommins (CBC)/ Ken Harvey (CBC)/ Sharon Simpson (CCG)</p> <p>Emma Kilcommins (CBC)/ Ken Harvey (CBC)/ Sharon Simpson (CCG)</p> <p>Members of JAP panel</p> <p>Emma Kilcommins (CBC)/ Ken Harvey (CBC)/ Sharon Simpson (CCG)</p> <p>Emma Kilcommins (CBC)/ Ken</p>	<p>By September 2014</p> <p>By September 2014</p> <p>November 2014 – March 2015</p> <p>May 2015</p>

¹¹ 20 miles is the statutory measurement of local placements to ensure children stay close to family/friends. Drawn from DFE (2010) *Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children*. UK: DFE.

		meet needs of those (assessed as suitable) within county.	Harvey (CBC)/ Simpson (CCG)	Sharon	
--	--	-----------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------	--------	--

Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date: 02 February 2015

Subject: Adoption and Fostering

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

Summary: This report introduces the Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose 2014/15, the Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2014/15 and the Adoption Reform Grant (2014 – 2015) for Members to consider and note.

Advising Officer: Gerard Jones, Assistant Director Operations

Contact Officer: Edward Wong, Head of Corporate Parenting Service

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The Adoption and Fostering Services support the Council's priorities listed below:

- The Children and Young People's Plan 2013-2015 Priority – Protecting Vulnerable Children. Improved educational attainment of looked after children and employment opportunities for care leavers
- Central Bedfordshire Council's Strategic Plan 2012-16 Priority 3 – Promote health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable. Looked after children and care leavers are considered vulnerable groups.

Corporate parenting responsibility impacts on the Council as a whole as well as the voluntary and independent sectors.

Financial:

1. The report in respect of the Adoption Reform Grant details how the grant has been used in quarters 1 to 3 2014-2015

Legal:

2. It is a statutory requirement to make explicit the Statement of Purpose for Adoption and Fostering respectively.

Risk Management:

3. None identified.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

4. None identified.

Equalities/Human Rights:

5. Adoption, Fostering and Private Fostering affect all sectors of communities.

Community Safety:

6. None identified

Sustainability:

7. None identified

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Panel notes the contents of:

- the Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose 2014/15
- the Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2014/15
- the Adoption Reform Grant (2014 -2015)

Appendices:

Appendix A - Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose 2014/15

Appendix B - Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2014/15

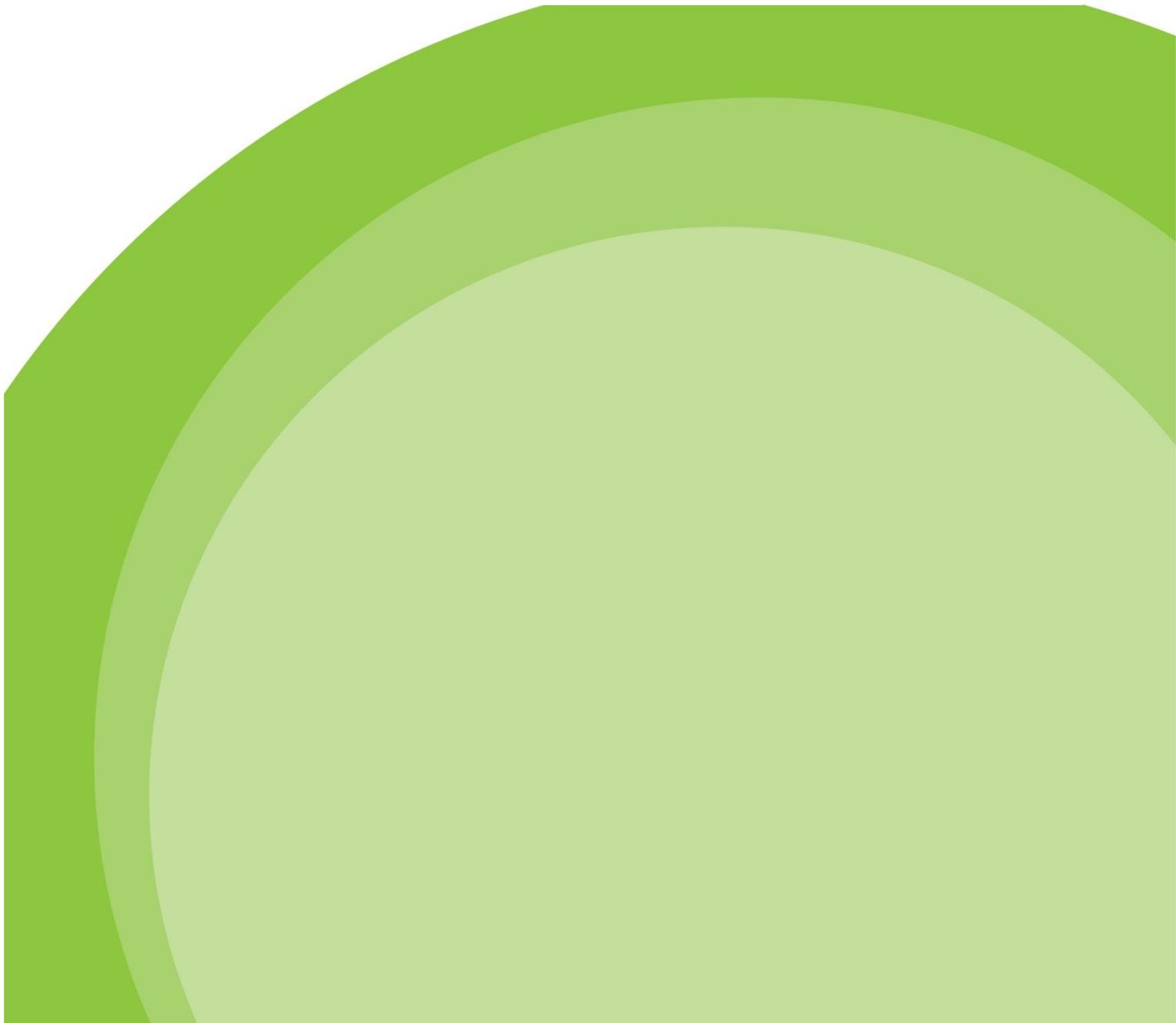
Appendix C - Adoption Reform Grant (2014 – 2015)

Background Papers:

None

Appendix A

**Adoption Agency
Statement of Purpose
2014/15**



Statement of Purpose
Central Bedfordshire Council - Adoption Agency

This Statement of Purpose has been produced in accordance with the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 and the National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2011, Standard 18.

CONTENTS

- 1. Background / Context / Status of the Adoption Service**
- 2. Aims and Objectives**
- 3. Management and Organisational Structure**
- 4. Services Provided by Central Bedfordshire Adoption Service**
- 5. Procedures**
- 6. Staffing**
- 7. Adoption Panel**
- 8. Quality Monitoring**
- 9. Complaints**
- 10. Allegations in respect of children placed for adoption**
- 11. Reviewing the Statement of Purpose**
- 12. The Registration Authority**
- 13. Contacts**

1. Background / Context / Status of the Adoption Service

The Adoption Service is part of The Corporate Parenting Service in Central Bedfordshire Council. The Adoption Service is based at Stevenson Court, Priory Business Park, in Bedford.

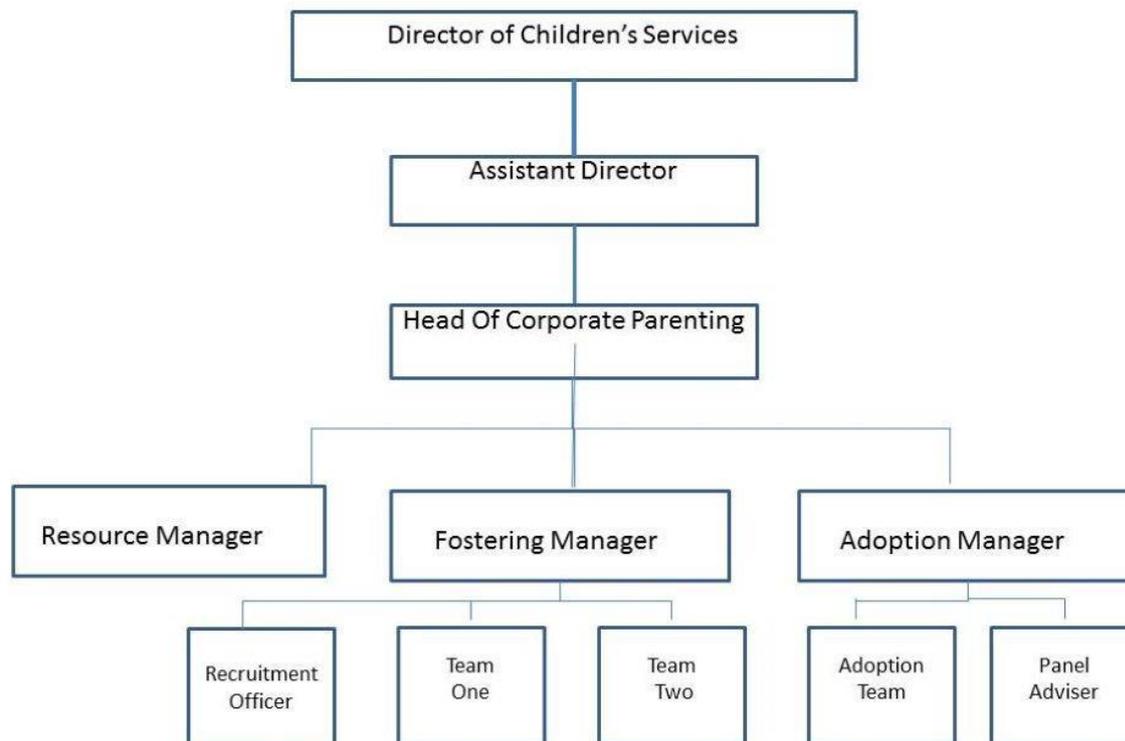
Prior to this, Central Bedfordshire's Adoption Service was a shared Service with Bedford Borough Council but this arrangement ceased in January 2014.

2. Aims and Objectives

The Adoption Service recognises the life long nature of adoption and other permanent placement options and aims:-

- To provide a high quality adoption and permanence service for the residents of Central Bedfordshire.
- To provide a suitable and timely adoptive placement for every child with a plan for adoption.
- To ensure that recruitment of adopters is targeted to meet the needs of children from Central Bedfordshire and nationally.
- To recruit a range of prospective adopters able to meet the diverse needs of children.
- To ensure safe, stable and consistent care for every child placed for adoption.
- To ensure that the ethnic origin, cultural background, religious heritage, language and identity of children are fully recognised and valued.
- To provide support services that ensure successful outcomes for children placed for adoption.
- To ensure that adoptive families are enabled to meet the health and education needs of children placed with them.
- To provide a range of support services for adopted adults.
- To offer timely information, advice and counselling to members of the public enquiring about adoption.
- To ensure support is provided for the birth relatives of the children who are placed for adoption by Central Bedfordshire Council.
- To ensure that, at all times, the Adoption Service complies with legislation and policy requirements which affect its activity.

3. Management and Organisational Structure



Ultimate responsibility for the Adoption Service rests with the Elected Members. The Adoption Service forms part of Central Bedfordshire Council's Children's Services for which the Director of Children's Services is responsible. The overall management responsibility for the Adoption Service is the Assistant Director, Children's Specialist Services. Operational managerial responsibility sits with the Head of Corporate Parenting. The Practice Manager for the Adoption Team supervises the adoption social workers and the Panel Advisor for adoption and fostering. The Resources and Placement Team, which is managed by the Head of Corporate Parenting, supports the adoption service in relation to recruitment of adopters, publicity and communications.

4. Services Provided by Central Bedfordshire Adoption Service

The Adoption Service provides the following services:

- Advice/counselling to those enquiring about adoption.
- Recruitment, assessment, approval and ongoing training and support of prospective adopters.
- Support for families who have adopted and for adopted children, through assessment of adoption support needs and provision of services. These services may include financial assistance, education support and a wide range of social work and therapeutic services.
- Training opportunities for all adoptive parents.

- Out of hours telephone support to prospective adopters with children placed for adoption and to adoptive families receiving adoption support.
- Assistance to access to birth records and counselling for adult adoptees.
- Intermediary services for adults adopted through the former Bedfordshire County Council and for adopted adults living in Central Bedfordshire.
- Support to birth relatives of Central Bedfordshire children with a plan for adoption.
- A contact support service for all parties involved in ongoing contact for all adopted children.
- A permanence planning, matching and family finding service for Central Bedfordshire Council Children's Social Care Teams.
- An adoption service to those wishing to adopt from overseas, through a Service Level Agreement with PACT (Parents and Children Together).
- Access to services provided by National Support Groups.
- Access to counselling services for birth family members.

5. Procedures

a) Recruitment, Preparation, Assessment and Support to Prospective Adopters

Central Bedfordshire Council has detailed policies and procedures for the recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of prospective adopters. The following is a summary of the recruitment, assessment and approval process in Central Bedfordshire. This follows the new two stage adopter recruitment and approval process as introduced by the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 and Statutory Adoption Guidance 2013 which came into force in July 2013, as part of the Government's Adoption Reform.

- Enquirers can telephone the Service on 0300 300 8090 and will automatically be passed to the Adoption Duty Worker. At this stage, the Adoption Duty Worker will gather basic information about the enquirers and answer initial questions about adoption.
- Prospective adopters contacting the Service are provided with written information about adoption within five working days. They are given the opportunity to meet with a social worker and provided with an Information Pack which includes a Registration of Interest Form (ROI).
- If the enquirer submits a Registration of Interest Form, this is passed to the Adoption Team Manager, who will consider whether or not to accept the Registration of Interest. Unless there is any obvious reason known as to why the Registration of Interest should not be accepted, the Team Manager will give permission to progress the enquiry to Stage One.
- The prospective adopter(s) are invited to a meeting with a member of the Adoption Team to complete a Stage One Plan (Agreement), detailing what will be expected of them and the Agency, at this stage.
- Stage One of the process is 'adopter led' and should normally take no more than two months to complete. The applicant should use this time to explore the extent of their

interest in and capacity for adoption, including considering Fostering for Adoption placements, whilst the Agency carries out Statutory Checks, in accordance with the Adoption Agency Regulations 2005.

- These Checks include:
 1. Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service Checks (DBS)
 2. Six written personal references of whom at least three are visited.
 3. Employment references.
 4. Local Authority checks.
 5. Medical checks.
- In addition, DBS Checks are taken up on any other person in the prospective adopter's household aged 18 and over.
- Central Bedfordshire Council will offer support to prospective adopters during Stage One as appropriate, the process being monitored by a co-ordinator within the team.
- Additionally, prospective adopters have the opportunity to attend an Information Event in order to hear more about adoption.
- Towards the end of Stage One, prospective adopters are offered an end of Stage One Interview in order to ascertain whether they wish to move on to Stage Two and if so, whether the Agency wishes to accept their application.
- Prospective adopters can take up to six months to complete Stage One if they so wish before needing to begin the process again.
- Following the end of the Stage One Interview, social workers will discuss with the Practice Manager whether the Agency feels able to accept an application from the prospective adopters at this time. This will be based on their potential ability to meet the needs of children requiring an adoptive family.
- Should the Practice Manager decide that a prospective adopter is not suitable to adopt, either during Stage One or at the end of Stage One, they will provide the prospective adopter with a written explanation of the reasons.
- If the Practice Manager decides that the prospective adopters can proceed to Stage Two, the case will be allocated to a Social Worker who will meet with them. A Stage Two Plan (Agreement) will be completed and the Social Worker will carry out an adopter assessment – Prospective Adopter Report (PAR). This should be completed and the decision as to the applicants' suitability be made within four months of the date of the Stage Two Plan.
- Applicants will be invited to attend Preparation Groups during the process of assessment.
- Once the assessment is completed this will be presented to the Adoption Panel for a recommendation. The recommendation is then presented to the Agency Decision Maker for a final decision on the applicants' suitability to adopt. Should the Agency Decision Maker be minded not to approve the application, prospective adopters can either make representations to the Service or to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

- The Adoption Team demonstrates a positive and supportive approach towards applications to adopt from previous adopters and foster carers wishing to adopt a child in their care. These assessments will be fast tracked, with prospective adopters moving directly to Stage Two.
- Following approval, Central Bedfordshire Council will seek to place the right child with the prospective adopters as soon as possible; either children in the care of the Council or nationally. This includes the active consideration of Fostering for Adoption placements alongside other adoptive placements in order to make the most suitable and timely placement for each child requiring adoption.
- Adopters for whom a match has not been identified within three months of approval will be referred to the National Adoption Register.
- The Adoption Team aims to provide ongoing support to adoptive families, and an adoption support plan will be drawn up before placement which identifies the likely support needs of the placement. This is then reviewed prior to the Adoption Order being granted.
- Children in adoptive placements are reviewed by the Independent Reviewing Officer. The Review helps identify when it is appropriate for an Adoption Order to be lodged by the applicants. In most cases, this would be decided by the time of the second Review. Adopters are supported by their Social Worker in making the application.

b) Adoption Support for adoptive parents and their children, adopted children and adults and birth relatives of adopted children and adults

Central Bedfordshire Council provides a range of ongoing support to adoptive families, including family events and activity groups for adopted young people. In line with legislation, adopters for whom we are the responsible Adoption Agency can ask for an assessment of their adoption support needs. The Adoption Support Services Adviser (ASSA) for Central Bedfordshire Council is (previously Head of Service) and can be contacted on the number stated below.

Central Bedfordshire Council provides a service to Adopted Adults and their Birth Relatives. Details of this service can be found on our website and in the leaflet Services to Adopted Adults and Their Birth Relatives.

The Adoption Team ensures that all those seeking to adopt are fully informed as to their entitlements in regards to adoption support, from the very beginning of the assessment process.

6. Staffing

The current complement is:

- 1 Practice Manager (full time)
- 3 Senior Practitioners (2 full time equivalent)
- 4 Social Workers (3.5 Full time equivalent)
- 2 Social Work Assistants (1 full time equivalent)

The Manager and Social Workers are all professionally qualified with commensurate social work experience. All staff have a Personal Development Review and have an identified training plan from which training will be provided on a bespoke basis or from Central Bedfordshire's Learning and Development Programme.

The professionally qualified Social Work staff are supported by an Administrative Team of two staff. The Adoption Team have also been committed to providing placements for Social Work students.

The Adoption Agency is supported by specialist staff who work across the Adoption and Fostering Service. These include a Recruitment and Marketing Officer and a Training Coordinator, as well as a Professional Panel Adviser and Panel Secretaries who support the Adoption Panel.

7. Adoption Panel

The Adoption Regulations require the Adoption Panel to consider the case of every child, prospective adopter, and proposed adoption placement referred to it by the adoption agency for consideration, prior to making its recommendation as to:

- a) Whether a child should be placed for adoption.
- b) Whether a prospective adopter is suitable to adopt a child.
- c) Whether a child should be placed for adoption with a particular prospective adopter.
- d) Whether on the information so far available a prospective adopter is unlikely to be suitable to adopt a child.
- e) Whether a prospective adopter, following review, is no longer suitable to adopt a child.

The Adoption Panel in Bedfordshire is a joint panel for Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Councils. It meets every month but can meet more frequently if need be. The Panel is chaired by an independent person who has considerable professional experience of adoption. In addition, panel members include the Fostering Team Manager of Bedford Borough Council, the Team Manager of the Children with Disabilities Team of Bedford Borough Council, the Medical Adviser who is an experienced Paediatrician, elected members, an Educational Psychologist, social workers, two adoptive parents and a birth parent. The Agency Adviser and a Panel Secretary are also in attendance but are non-voting members. Written legal advice is available to the panel from the Legal Adviser who on occasion may be present but is not a panel member.

Changes in Regulations which came into force from 1 September 2012 have meant that decisions about whether a child should be placed for adoption are now made by the Agency Decision Maker without recourse to the Panel. However, this only applies to cases where consent for adoption has not already been given by the child's parents.

Agency Decisions

Each council has a delegated senior manager to make decisions based on the Panel's recommendations. These decisions are made within seven working days of receiving the minutes of the Panel meeting.

8. Quality Monitoring

The quality of the work of the Adoption Service is monitored at all levels through staff supervision. In addition, the Agency Adviser provides scrutiny and feedback as does the Adoption Panel. Recruitment information is tracked through weekly management reports and management information is considered at fortnightly managers' meetings. Regular reports are provided to the Corporate Parenting Panel. Feedback from service users is sought at regular intervals e.g. after Information Evenings, Preparation Training, Panel, Adoption Order.

In addition the Service is subject to inspection by Ofsted.

9. Complaints

The Adoption Service uses the Children's Services Complaints Policy and Procedure, for dealing with and monitoring complaints by prospective adopters, adopters, birth relatives, staff and other parties with a relevant interest in the Adoption Service.

Complaints and their outcomes are recorded by the Customer Relations Department of Central Bedfordshire Council, but a central record is also kept within the Adoption Service. This is for statistical purposes and to enable the Service to respond and learn from complaints made. The Council is developing a database which will in future enable customers to make and track a complaint via the Council's website.

Complaints by children are dealt with under the Children's Services Children Act Complaints Procedure, which means a shorter time for responding to children's complaints and the provision of independent advocacy for complainants.

The Complaints Procedure has several stages: Stage 1 applies to local resolution but if this is not achieved, there are two more stages. Information on these further stages is available from the Adoption Service or from Central Bedfordshire's Customer Relations Department.

10. Allegations in respect of children placed for adoption

Allegations in respect of children placed for adoption are dealt with in accordance with Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures and Central Bedfordshire procedures for managing allegations regarding such children.

11. Reviewing the Statement of Purpose

This Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually, but may be amended at any time, in the light of major legislative or policy changes. This review will be carried out by the Head of Service of the Corporate Parenting Service and the Practice Manager of the Adoption Service. Any changes to the document will be formally approved by the Director of Children's Services and the Executive Member for Children's Services and will be notified to the Registration Authority within 28 days.

This statement of purpose will next be reviewed in March 2015.

12. The Registration Authority

The Registration Authority is:

Ofsted
Royal Exchange Buildings
St. Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

Tel: 08456 404045
E-mail: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

13. Contacts

For more information about Adoption in Central Bedfordshire please contact:

Adoption Team
Corporate Parenting Service
Central Bedfordshire Council
Unit 16 Stephenson Court
Fraser Road
Priory Business Court
Bedford MK44 3WJ

Tel: 0300 300 8090

For copies of the Complaints Procedure or further copies of this Statement of Purpose, please contact the Adoption Service on the contact details above.

If you wish to comment on this Statement of Purpose, on the Adoption Service or make a complaint, please contact:

Head of Corporate Parenting Service, Adoption and Fostering Service, Unit 16 Stephenson Court, Fraser Road, Priory Business Park, Bedford, MK44 3WJ



Approved:

Signed.....

**Sue Harrison
Director of Children's Services**

Dated.....

Signed.....

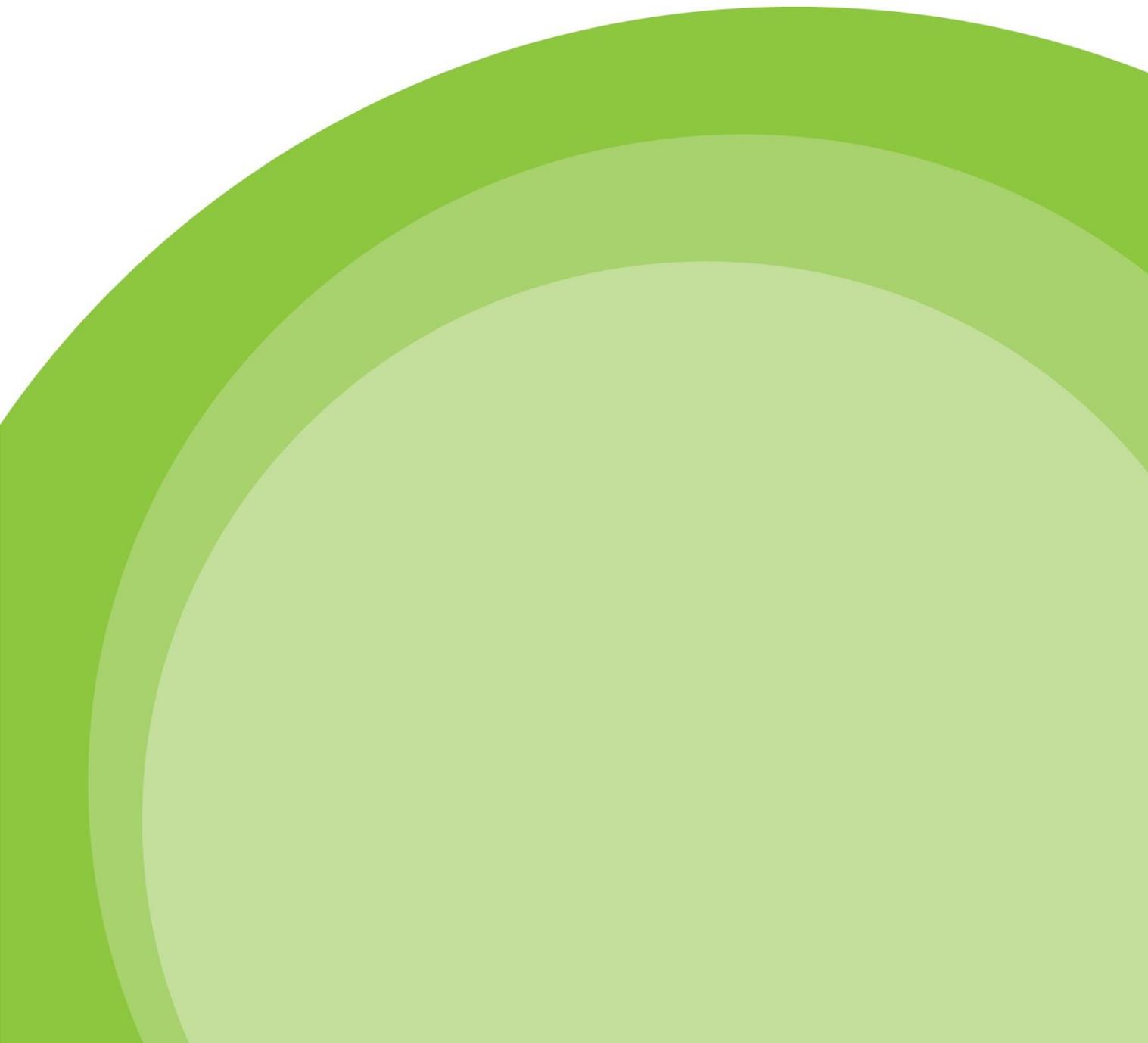
**Cllr Mark Versallion
Executive Member for Children's Services**

Dated.....

This page is intentionally left blank

Appendix B

**Fostering Service
Statement of Purpose
2014/15**



Statement of Purpose – Central Bedfordshire Fostering Teams

This Statement of Purpose arises from Regulation 3 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and Standard 16 of the Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011.

CONTENTS

1. Introduction
 2. Status and Constitution
 3. Aims and Objectives
 4. Management and Staff Structure
 5. Services Provided by the Fostering Teams
 6. Profile of Foster Carers
 7. Profile of Children Placed in Foster Care
 8. Complaints
 9. Allegations
 10. Procedures / Processes for Recruiting, Approving, Training, Supporting and Reviewing Foster Carers
 11. Other Relevant Procedures
 12. Quality Monitoring
 13. The Registration Authority
 14. Contacts
- Appendix A: Structure of the Service

1. Introduction

The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the Fostering Regulations 2011, issued by the Secretary of State under section 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, govern the work of fostering service providers throughout England.

Standard 1 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and Regulation 3(1) of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 require a fostering agency to produce a Statement of Purpose which contains a range of detailed information as set out in Standard 1.4. This Statement of Purpose has been prepared in accordance with these arrangements.

The National Minimum Standards (1.3) also requires the registered provider (in the case of a local authority, the elected members) to formally approve the Statement of Purpose of the Fostering Service. The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually but may be amended at any time, in the light of major legislative or policy changes. This review will be carried out by the Head of Corporate Parenting Service and Managers in the Fostering Teams. Any changes to the document will be formally approved by elected members and will be notified to the Regulatory Authority within 28 days. This Statement of Purpose will next be reviewed in July 2015.

This Statement of Purpose is available to all foster carers, prospective foster carers, parents and anyone working for the purpose of the Fostering Service and is available on the Council website: www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk. A copy of the Statement of Purpose is also made available to Ofsted, who will also be notified within 28 days of any revisions of the Statement of Purpose.

A Children's guide is available to all children in care, when placed, who are of sufficient understanding to be able to benefit from the information contained in the guide. A copy of the Children's guide is also given to all foster carers. The guide is provided in different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children and sets out to explain what foster care is, it includes a summary of what the Fostering Teams set out to do for children, how a child can secure access to an Independent Advocate and how to complain.

Some of the statistical information included in this Statement of Purpose relates to activities undertaken in the previous year 2013/2014. During 2013 Central Bedfordshire Council's hosted a Fostering Service as a shared one on behalf of Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council. The statistical information included in this report, therefore, reflects the activities of the joint service up until 31 December 2013. As of the 1st January 2014 Central Bedfordshire Fostering Teams operated as a single agency.

2. Status and Constitution

Central Bedfordshire Council's Fostering Teams are part of the Corporate Parenting Service within Children's Services and comply with its policies and procedures. Policies and procedures specific to fostering comply with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, the Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011 and the Children Act 1989, Guidance and Regulations: Volume 4:Fostering Services. Procedures cover the recruitment, training, approval, support and review of foster carers and the operation of the Fostering Panel. All policies/procedures are accessible to foster carers and staff via Tri-ex and accurately reflect the Statement of Purpose.

<http://centralbedfordshirechildcare.proceduresonline.com>

3. Aims and Objectives

- 3.1. To provide a high quality Fostering Service to children, their birth parents, foster carers and social work colleagues
- 3.2. To provide foster placements that meet the needs of children requiring such a placement
- 3.3. To ensure safe, stable and consistent care for every child placed in foster care
- 3.4. To ensure that the ethnic origin, cultural background, religious heritage and language of children are fully recognised, valued and promoted
- 3.5. To recruit a range of foster carers from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds to meet the needs of children needing placements
- 3.6. To provide support services that promotes and enables the retention of foster carers
- 3.7. To ensure that, at all times, the teams provide services that are effective and that practices are clear, open, honest and fair to all Service users
- 3.8. To ensure that foster carers are enabled to promote positive outcomes for children placed with them
- 3.9. To actively promote and support training opportunities for all foster carers
- 3.10. To ensure that the Fostering Teams meet Fostering Regulations, National Minimum Standards and best practice.

4. Management and Staff Structure

The ultimate responsibility for the Fostering Teams rest with the Elected Members.

The Assistant Director gives strategic leadership to Children's Services and is one of the Agency Decision Makers for the Fostering Panel.

The Head of Corporate Parenting Service co-ordinates the activities of the Fostering Teams with those of Children in Care social work and Adoption Team, and promotes partnership working across Children's Services and partner agencies

The Practice Manager for Fostering provides operational management, quality assurance, performance and budget management and co-ordinates the work of the two Fostering Teams. In addition to supervising the work of the two Fostering Team Managers, the Practice Manager also supervises/manages the work of the Marketing and Recruitment Officer and Training Officer whose work covers both fostering and adoption.

The Panel Adviser for the Fostering and Permanence Panel is supervised by the Adoption Practice Manager. The Practice Manager also reports to senior managers on service activities and issues of concern.

Team Managers are responsible for the day to day management of Social Workers recruiting, assessing and supervising foster carers, matching of children to available carers, dealing with complaints and representations and producing activity reports and statistical returns.

Both Team Managers provide regular supervision to their respective team of Social Workers/Social Work Assistants. As part of the Corporate Parenting Service they work closely with the Marketing and Recruitment Officer and the other teams in relation to Resources/ Adoption/ Children in Care/ Court/ Leaving Care as well as liaising with the Disabled Children's Team/Early Intervention Teams and partner agencies.

The Practice/Team Managers and all social workers are professionally qualified with commensurate social work experience. All staff have a Personal Development Review (P.D.R.) and have an identified training plan for which training will be provided on a bespoke basis or from Central Bedfordshire Council's Learning and Development Programme. In addition to the Social Workers and Social Work Assistants the team is supported by two FTE administrative staff. A structure of the service is attached in Appendix A.

5. Services provided by the Fostering Team

In line with the Fostering Teams aims and objectives, a range of services are provided to children, young people and foster carers.

Services provided include:

Short term placements

Central Bedfordshire Fostering Teams provide placements for children from 0-18 years, to meet the needs of both emergency and planned admissions following referrals from Early Intervention or Children in Care Teams. Short term placements may last from a few days, up to two years and may be used to work towards a child's return home or to complete care proceedings and put in plans for permanence. Foster carers receive an allowance to cover the cost of caring for children in their care as well as a fee. The fee carers receive depends on which tier they are on and this is determined by length of service and whether they have completed their Training, Support and Development Standards (T.S.D.'s).

Respite Placements

Respite foster carers are approved foster carers who choose to offer placements on a very time-limited basis only. This may be through choice or because of limitations in their availability. Most respite carers have full or part –time jobs.

Respite carers offer placements to parents or carers of children living in the community where their assessed needs indicate a benefit from respite care away from their family. This may be to relieve family stress, or to do some direct work with a challenging young person.

Respite carers also offer respite care to children cared for by other foster carers.

Family Link Placements

The Family Link Scheme provides short breaks for children with a disability with matched carers who are identified as able to meet their needs. Children are provided with care for various amounts of time from day care to overnights or week long periods. Family link carers are approved foster carers. They receive general and specific information and training regarding their role as a family link carer in one to one sessions and workshops. They are provided with specific information about the disability of the child they are linked to. Opportunities to gain experience through visits to other services for disabled children's departments are offered where appropriate. Guidance from relevant health professionals is offered in relation to specific health needs of the child e.g. specialised nurses and occupational therapists.

Family Link carers are matched to a specific child or children and planning meetings are held with the parents to make all the arrangements for the nature of the short break e.g. whether day care, or overnight, and to share information about the child's needs.

Short breaks may be offered for up to 75 days per year, but the normal maximum does not exceed 48 days. Typically, the scheme offers one weekend a month, day care and additional sessions during the long summer months.

The Service also has a number of self employed carers who are available full time to care for up to 7 children on a rota basis; these carers receive an enhanced fee to care for these children.

Youth Care Placements

Youth Care foster carers provide specialist placements for 10-18 year olds who may have complex needs and are difficult to place. As well as receiving an enhanced fee to general foster carers they receive specialist and more frequent supervision, support groups and other support services.

Family and Friends Care (Connected Persons) Placements

It is an underlying principle that children should be enabled to live within their families unless this is not consistent with their welfare. Children's Services, therefore, work to maintain children within their own family, and facilitate services to support such arrangements, whenever this is consistent with the child's safety and wellbeing. When children cannot live within their immediate family and the Local Authority is considering the need to look after the child, social workers will make strenuous efforts to identify potential carers within the child's network of family or friends who are able and willing to care for the child, whether this be in an emergency situation or in a planned way.

Although the assessment process and timescales are different for family and friends carers (connected persons) these carers still receive similar levels of support to general carers albeit more specialist.

In addition to the services outlined above the Fostering Teams also provide the following services:

Recruitment, assessment, approval, on-going training, supervision and review of foster carers

- A matching/placement service for the social work teams in Central Bedfordshire Council.
- Support Groups for foster carers, including a Family & Friends Support Group.
- Support Groups for foster carers' children.
- Annual awards event and other social events.
- Mentoring Scheme for newly approved foster carers or those requiring additional support e.g. following an allegation.
- 'Talk time' forum – an opportunity for foster carers to meet with senior managers regarding fostering issues.
- An Out-of-Hours Telephone Support Service for foster carers.
- An Advice Service to colleagues, other professionals and members of the public on fostering issues.

6. Profile of Foster Carers

On 31 March 2014 the Fostering Teams had 95 fostering households which included 7 Family Link households, 7 Respite households, 6 Youth Care households, 9 households offering long term care and 27 Family and Friends households, the remaining 46 households were carers offering short term/emergency care. Of the 95 households this equated to 156 foster carers. Out of the 156 foster carers 137 described their ethnicity as white, 11 were Black/Caribbean, 6 were Black/African 1 described themselves as Black Other and the remaining 1 described themselves as Mixed/Other.

7. Profile of Children Placed in Foster Care

On 31 March 2014, there were 96 children placed with Central Bedfordshire foster carers, which included 14 children from other Local Authorities (13 from Bedford Borough and 1 from Luton Borough). The Family Link Scheme was providing short breaks for 10 children with disabilities. There were 4 children placed in Youth Care placements.

In terms of ethnicity of the children placed 81 were described as white, 12 were described as being from a mixed ethnic group and 3 were described as black/other.

8. Complaints

The Fostering Team uses the Children's Services Complaints Policy and Procedure for dealing with and monitoring complaints by foster carers, birth parents and relatives, staff and other parties with a relevant interest about the way fostering services are provided.

Complaints and their outcomes are recorded by the Customer Relations Department of the Council, but a central record is also kept within the Fostering Team. This is for statistical purposes and to enable the Team to respond and learn from complaints made.

Complaints by children are dealt with under the Children's Services Children Act Complaints Procedure, which means a shorter time for responding to children's complaints and the provision of independent advocacy for complainants.

The Complaints Procedure has several stages: Stage 1 applies to local resolution but if this is not achieved, there are two more stages. Information on these further stages is available from the Fostering Service or from Central Bedfordshire's Customer Relations Department.

Complaints against Foster Carers

Complaints about foster carers are also subject to the Children's Services Complaints Procedure. All foster carers, subject to any complaint, are offered independent support from The Fostering Network's Advice and Mediation Service.

Between 01 April 2013 and the 31 March 2014 there were 4 complaints made about the Fostering Team (1 from a child, 2 from foster carers and 1 from another professional). Out of these 4 complaints 3 were either upheld or partially upheld).

9. Allegations against Foster Carers

Allegations against foster carers are dealt with in accordance with Local Safeguarding Children's Board procedures for managing allegations and concerns about Foster Carers. All foster carers, subject to any allegation, are offered independent support from the Fostering Network's Advise and Mediation Service.

Between 01 April 2013 and the 31 March 2014 there were 7 allegations of misconduct made against foster carers. None of these required reporting to the Independent Safeguarding Authority and no Section 47 enquiries were made involving allegations against foster carers.

10. Procedures/Processes for Recruiting, Approving, Training, Supporting and Reviewing Foster Carers

The Fostering Teams have procedures which cover:

- Advertising and Recruitment
- Foster Carer Assessment and Approval
- Ongoing Supervision Support and Training
- Reviewing the Approval of Foster Carers
- Appeals against Refusal or Termination of Approval.

Recruitment and Marketing

Recruitment and marketing activities have taken place throughout the year and have included adverts/stories in the press, use of on-line recruitment/marketing and face-to-face recruitment events.

The Teams have a Marketing and Recruitment Strategy which informs the recruitment and marketing activities within the teams and is overseen by the Team Manager.

Foster Carer Assessment and Approval

Prospective foster carers are assessed in line with the two Stage Assessment Process which includes attending in depth 'Skills to Foster' preparation training. Assessments are undertaken by fostering social workers and a written report, using the BAAF Form F, is then presented to the Fostering & Permanence Panel for a recommendation about approval. The Panel deals with all short term, respite and permanent fostering. Prospective foster carers are encouraged to attend the Panel when their application is being discussed. It is the aim of the Fostering Teams to complete this process for each applicant within twenty weeks of application.

The Fostering and Permanence Panel

Central Bedfordshire Fostering Teams are compliant with the Fostering Service Regulations 2011. According to these regulations, all fostering services have to set up a Fostering Panel to carry out the following duties:

- To consider applications and to recommend whether or not applicants are suitable to be approved as foster carers.
- Recommend the terms on which fostering approval is to be given (i.e. the number of children/young people, types of placements).
- Consider foster carer annual reviews: The first review of newly approved foster carers will be presented to the panel and any subsequent reviews referred to it by the fostering team.
- To give advice and make recommendations regarding any other matter referred to them by the fostering team.
- To oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the fostering team.

Ongoing Support and Training

Following approval, all foster carers are allocated a supervising social worker from one of the Fostering Teams, who has supervision with the carer at least every six weeks, whether or not they have a child placed with them. Out-of-hours telephone support is also available to all foster carers. The Teams have quarterly Foster Carer Forums ('Talk Time'), where foster carers have the opportunity to meet and exchange views with senior managers. In addition, the Fostering Teams provide periodic social events for foster carers and their children, and recognises the dedication and commitment of their foster carers with an annual Awards event. Ongoing training is provided by the Fostering Teams, either directly or by encouraging foster carers to attend courses provided by Children's Services.

New carers are offered induction training and a professional mentoring scheme, whereby they receive additional support and guidance from an experienced foster carer.

Foster carers have access to the Foster Carers Handbook which contains useful information for foster carers in relation to fostering issues

Foster carers are required to complete the Training, Support and Development Standards (T.S.D.'s) within the first 12 months of being approved. The Fostering Teams provide the necessary support to foster carers (via regular workshops and meetings with supervising asocial workers) to meet the T.S.D. standards and complete their portfolios.

The Teams also arrange various monthly support groups for foster carers and regular events for the children of foster carers.

Foster carers also run their own Foster Care Association which is supported by Central Bedfordshire Council.

Reviewing the Approval of Foster Carers

The approval status of all foster carers is reviewed annually or whenever there is a change of circumstances or concern about the standard of care. First Annual Reviews and those where there is a change in carer's terms of approval or where there have been a complaint or allegation are presented to the Fostering and Permanence Panel for consideration. Foster carers are invited and encouraged to attend Panel for their Review.

All other Reviews are presented to the Manager of the Fostering Teams for a decision about ongoing approval.

Appeals against Refusal or Termination of Approval

Prospective foster carers whose application to foster is not approved by the Decision Maker following Panel, or existing foster carers who have their approval withdrawn, or amended following a Review, have the right to appeal against such decisions. The Fostering Teams leaflet for carers and prospective carers attending Panel, explains the Appeal and Independent Review Mechanism process. Applicants can ask Panel to reconsider their case or alternatively can ask for an independent review from the national Independent Review Mechanism.

Connected Persons (Family & Friends carers)

The Fostering Teams also assess, approve and support Connected Persons in line with the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2013. The Fostering & Permanence Panel recommends suitability following the Temporary Approval assessment as well as the full (Connected Persons) fostering assessment. Once a Connected Person has been approved as a Foster Carer, they receive a similar level of support and supervision as mainstream foster carers (although, more specialist), including access to the Family & Friends Support Group and a Foster Carer Mentor.

11. Other Relevant Procedures

The Fostering Teams also have a range of procedures including:

- Child Protection & Safeguarding
- Safer Care
- The Establishment, Function and Operation of the Fostering Panel
- Fostering Allowances
- Confidentiality and Security of Information
- Equal Opportunities**Health and Safety

In addition, there are a number of policies used across all Children's Services as well as Local Children's Safeguarding Board Policies.

12. Quality Monitoring

The quality of the work of the Fostering Teams are monitored at all levels through the staff supervision system. In addition, the Panel Professional Adviser and the Fostering and Permanence Panel provide quality control' for foster carer assessments, and feedback from consumers comes via Foster Carer Reviews, Child Care Reviews and the complaints procedure. There are regular audits of case records. The Registered Manager for the Fostering Agency (Team Manager) completes a monthly monitoring check, which includes collating notifications, concerns and complaints and sampling records

13. The Registration Authority

The Regulatory Authority is:

Ofsted
Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

Tel: 08456 404040
E-mail: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

The Fostering Teams are subject to regular inspection and inspection reports are available from the Fostering Teams or on www.ofsted.org.uk

14. Contacts

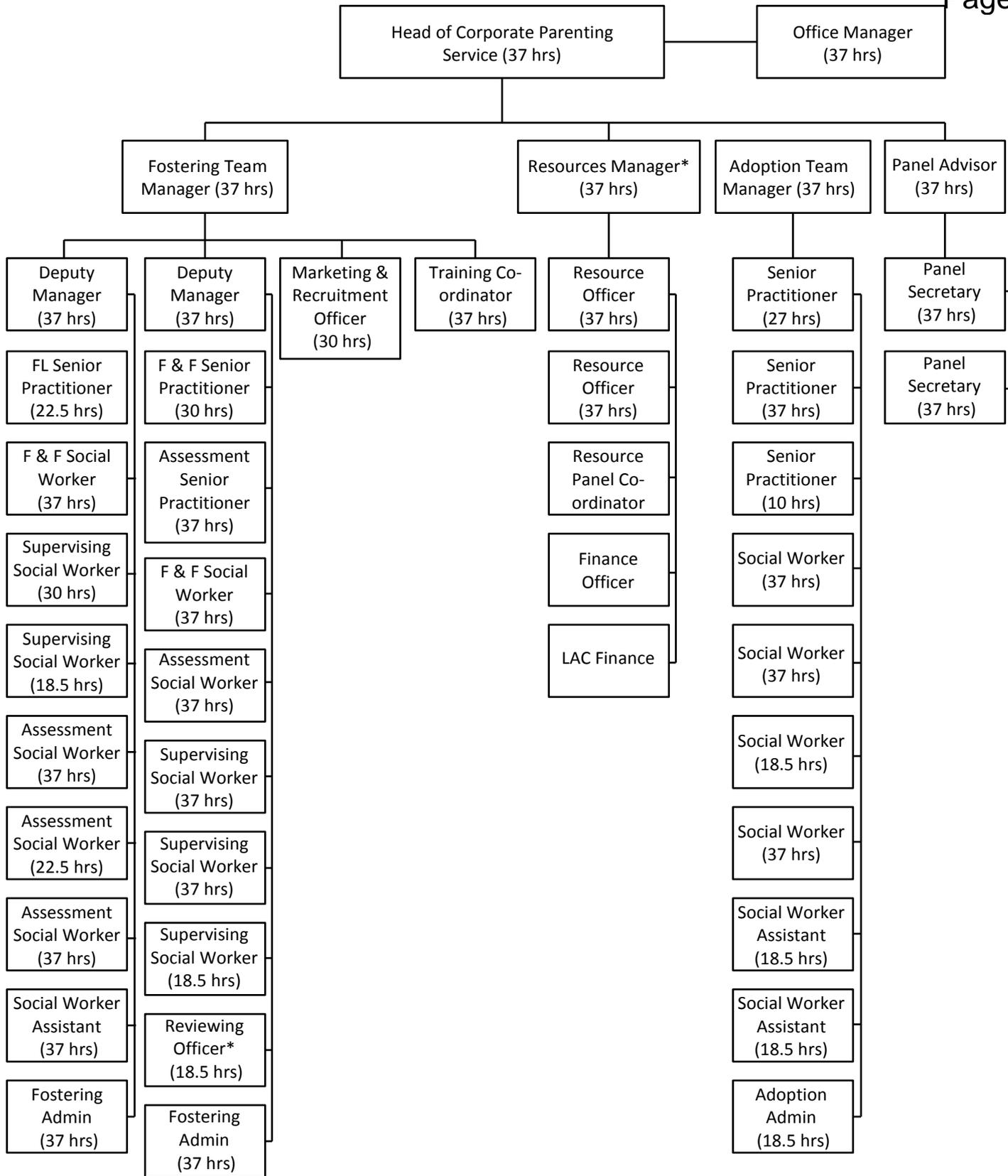
For more information about Fostering in Central Bedfordshire please contact:

Fostering Team
Corporate Parenting Service
Central Bedfordshire Council
Unit 16 Stephenson Court
Fraser Road
Priory Business Court
Bedford MK44 3WJ

Tel: 0300 300 8090

For copies of the Children's Guide, the Complaints Procedure or further copies of this Statement of Purpose, please contact one of the Fostering Teams on the contact details above.

If you would like further information or wish to comment on this Statement of Purpose, please do not hesitate to contact the Fostering Team, in writing or on the phone using the contact information outlined above. Your interest and comments are welcome.



* Vacant post
 F & F Family and Friends
 FL Family Link



Fostering Service Statement of Purpose

2014 - 2015

Approved:

Signed.....

**Sue Harrison
Director of Children's Services**

Dated.....

Signed.....

**Cllr Mark Versallion
Executive Member for Children's Services**

Dated.....

Appendix C

**ADOPTION REFORM GRANT: PART B - GRANT DETERMINATION
(2014 - 2015): No 31/2117**

ANNEX C

Progress Report for Q1, Q2 and Q3 2014-2015

Organisation Name:	Central Bedfordshire Council	Grant Ref no:	31/2117
---------------------------	------------------------------	----------------------	---------

Please provide details of the ways in which the money was spent on adoption in Q1, Q2 and Q3 2014 - 2015:		
Item	Amount spent	Budget
Case progression officer based in Court and Permanency Teams, Corporate Parenting Services. However, the officer works across the entire children's social care teams. She assists with the early identification and tracking of children where adoption is the plan. This is to avoid drift or delay and to assist with early matching.	£48750	£65,000
Marketing officer in Adoption This has enhanced the quality of advertising, both generic and specific; further activity planned for remainder of the year.	£15000	£20,000
Recruitment assistant, who has improved the rate of recruitment and monitors the Stage 1 process. In addition, to drive the new adopter recruitment process, including increased information events and new publicity materials. These steps contribute to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of adopters • Speedier approval process 	£18750	£25,000
Remarketing of Adoption materials. Including use of web-based materials such as e-learning for adopters at stage 1.	£6000	£8,000
Increase assessing social worker capacity for adopter assessments via the use of independent adoption assessors. To enable sufficient approvals to meet the needs of the growing number of children for whom adoption is the plan	£22500	£30,000
Specific adoption support projects such as the provision of support for children's life-story work,	£11250	£15,000

to ensure that children have a good understanding of their life story which assists with positive attachment and placement stability. Achieved through the use of suitably skilled individuals from existing staff.		
Interagency fees. Continuation of specialist Family Finding projects, to find families for difficult to place children and reduce delays in matching children. Achieved through contact with VAA's and local authorities	£50183	£66,911
Total	£172,433	£229,911

Please provide a summary of the approach taken by the local authority in spending this money, highlighting the innovative elements of this approach:

Central Bedfordshire Adoption Service has been able make some significant progress to the service provided to the children and families of Bedfordshire, especially within adopter recruitment and assessment. We have considered the many factors which impact on the success of adoptive placements and aim to continue to develop and review our service to ensure this positive progress continues.

Our goal it to ensure we provide a child centred, robust recruitment and assessment process. The use of specialist workers and the ongoing development of staff and panel member all assist in this process.

Please provide a summary of the impact this expenditure has had on the local authority's provision of adoption services to date:

- Numbers of children adopted continues to increase.
- Specialists workers are involved in the tracking and early identification of children in need of adoption which has improved early planning
- Recruitment targets for adopters and numbers of children being placed continues to be met

Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date: 02 February 2015

Subject: Quarter Three Fostering Service Report

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

Summary: The report outlines the activities in the Fostering Service during the third quarter (October-December) of the financial year 2014-2015.

Contact Officer: Gerard Jones, Assistant Director Operations

Advising Officer: Annie Craig, Fostering Service Manager

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. The Fostering Agency comes under the umbrella of the Corporate Parenting Service and the Head of Service has overall management responsibility for Fostering. Under the Head of Service is the Practice Manager who is also the registered manager for Fostering. This person monitors and manages the activities of the fostering agency. She supervises 2 team managers who have day to day responsibility for management of the 2 fostering teams. Currently there are 14.3 FTE Social Workers with the Service, 1.5 FTE Social Work Assistant, 1 FTE Marketing Recruitment Officer, 1 FTE Training Co-ordinator a part time panel adviser and 2 panel secretaries supporting the Service in relation to recruitment, training, panel and placements, 2 FTE Administrators also support the two Fostering Teams.

Equality/Human Rights

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

Community Safety

6. Not applicable.

Sustainability

7. Not applicable.

Procurement

8. Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATION:

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

Background

9. 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 third quarter report for the financial year 2014/2015.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

10. During October, November and December a variety of recruitment activities/events took place in line with the Fostering Service recruitment strategy.
11. Outreach events included attendance at a Health and Wellbeing event at RAF Henlow, a recruitment stall at Luton and Dunstable hospital, Morrison's in Houghton Regis, Waitrose in Ampthill and a food bank coffee morning in Wootton. Information evenings were also held in Bedford and Dunstable.
12. Various leaflet drops took place in Sainsbury, Morrison's and Asda stores in Bramingham, Luton, Shefford, Houghton Regis and Biggleswade. Posters and leaflets were delivered to Costa Coffee shops in Bedford, Ampthill, Luton and Dunstable, to Keech Hospice in Luton as well as to garden centres in Flitwick and Wixham. 'Fostering as a career' posters were designed with the aim of putting in job centres around the county in January 2015, timescales of these still needs to be agreed.
13. In relation to press coverage, an article regarding the foster carers' celebration event went in Dunstable Today and Biggleswade Today. Coverage of the National Sons and Daughters Awards went into Bedford and Times Citizen (print and online) and the Dunstable Gazette (print and online). A Fostering article aimed at child-minders was placed in the Early Years Newsletter and an article about fostering was placed in the Winter Church Magazine which was distributed to 700 households in Stotfold. BBC 3 Counties interviewed a foster carer who received a National Award regarding her outstanding contribution to fostering. Coverage of the foster carer receiving this award was also placed in Bedford and Times Citizen (print and online) as well as Bedford Today. 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.
14. On line posts were placed on Facebook advertising outreach events/Christmas activities and advertising/promoting fostering for Central Bedfordshire Council. Further posts were placed advertising Information evenings and the fees scheme. A further post was placed with scanned jigsaw pieces where LAC anonymously write their views on what foster carers have done, were doing and could do to make a difference to their lives.
15. As a result of the recruitment drive during this period we received a total of 35 enquiries. There were 19 in October, 6 in November and 10 in December. There were 17 initial visits allocated during this period, 10 in October, 5 in November and 2 in December. There were 7 application forms received during this period, 1 for October, 4 for November and 2 for December.

Assessments

16. As of the 31 December 2104 there were 28 assessments under way, 14 for career carers, 4 Regulation 24 (emergency family and friends), 3 full family and

friends/connected persons and 7 Special Guardianship Order (S.G.O) assessments.

17. During this quarter 4 families were approved to foster, 2 were as career carers to provide short/long term care, 1 was a career carer to provide family link for children with disabilities and 1 was as a family and friends carer.
18. As of the 31 December 2014 the Fostering Agency had 98 fostering households (compared to 95 in April). 71 of these carers were mainstream (compared to 68 in April) and 27 Family and Friends/Reg. 24 (compared to 25 in April).
19. As of the 31 December 2014 the Agency were supporting 3 Private Foster carers and between them were caring for 7 children.
20. As of the 31 December 2014 there were 106 S.G.O's in place (compared to 88 at the end of April). The majority of the S.G.O. orders were granted to Family and Friends foster carers so the children they cared for were no longer classed as looked after. Had the status of these children's placements not transferred to S.G.O.'s the number of children in care would have significantly increased.

Referrals/Placement

21. During October, November and December 18 new fostering placements were made; 9 in October, 3 in November and 6 in December. This is a decrease of 15 new placements made compared to the last quarter. Out of the 18 new placements 14 were placed in-house. All of the 4 children placed with I.F.A. carers were placed by the Emergency Duty Team when the office was closed.
22. During this period 16 placements ended; 5 because SG.O.'s were granted; 2 because Child Arrangement Orders were granted, 6 returned home and 3 were adopted.
23. As of the 31 December 2014 there were a total of 100 children living with in-house foster carers compared to 91 in December 2013. This is a positive increase in in-house provision as it means 10% more children have been placed in in house provision rather than with I.F.A.'s. As of the 31 December 2014 there were a total of 86 children in I.F.A. placements compared to 108 in December 2013. This means our reliance on I.F.A. placements has reduced by 22% and we now have significantly more children placed in house than with I.F.A.'s. In December 2013 only 45% of our children were placed in house this figure is now 54%.

Training

24. During October, November and December 17 training courses took place. Courses covered topics such as first aid, therapy, Crisis intervention, safeguarding on line, supporting educational potential, ADHD, contact, working with birth parents, skills to foster and family and friends preparation.

25. Some of the training provided was open to foster carers from other Local Authorities and a number of carers from Bedford Borough and Luton attended training which enabled the Service to generate a small income.
26. As of the 31 December 2014 there were 71 fostering households who had completed their mandatory Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD); 14 households were yet to complete their portfolios, but still had time to address within the required timescale. 3 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

27. Whenever a significant event happens, i.e. a child goes missing from placement or a serious incident/accident occurs, the agency has to report these to Ofsted. During this period there were 4 notifications; 3 in October (2 regarding a young person who went absent from his placement for or a week and another concerning a young person who went absent twice for less than 24 hours). There were none in November and 1 in December (a young person went absent from placement for less than 24 hours). All young persons who have been missing are referred to the return interview service.

Allegations

28. There was 1 allegation made during this period. In October a grand daughter of a family and friends foster carer said the carer had smacked her (the child was not a Looked After Child (LAC). The Local Area Designated Officer (LADO) was consulted who agreed the matter should be dealt with by the supervising social worker. A Joint Evaluation Meeting (J.E.M.) was also held in December concerning a foster carer who showed poor judgement in managing a young person's challenging behaviour and reacted with the use of an inappropriate physical intervention towards the young person. Appropriate strategies were put in place to support the carer to manage the young person's behaviour and prevent further incidents happening again.

Complaints

29. No complaints about the fostering service were received during this period.

Compliments

30. During this period the agency received 6 compliments; 4 in November and 2 in December. The compliments in November included 1 foster carer attending panel who advised that she had 'the best supervising social worker she had ever had'. While completing an S.G.O. assessment on a private foster carer the applicant and children all spoke highly of the worker from the fostering team who had supported them and stated 'they would be sad when her involvement ended'. An Independent Reviewing Officers (I.R.O.) rang one of our foster carers to thank her for 'their excellent care of D and for the marvellous book

that they sent with him full of memories'. An assessing social worker from the fostering team also received an email from a family and friends carer which stated 'we would like to express our thanks for your help, guidance and understanding through what has been a difficult and often tearful assessment'. In December, 1 of the compliments was from an I.R.O. regarding the positive care provided by a foster carer, the other compliment was from a carer who had recently obtained an S.G.O. who stated 'a massive thank you for everything you have done for us and for E, words cannot describe how we feel'.

31. As well as the compliments received in October, 3 of our sons and daughters of foster carers received national awards from the Fostering Network for their contribution to their fostering family. An awards ceremony was held and the children were presented with their certificates and trophies by the Director of Children's Services. In December, 1 of our foster carers also received a national award from the Fostering Network for her outstanding contribution to fostering. An awards ceremony was held for her where, again, the Director of Children's Services presented her with her certificate and trophy.

Conclusion

32. In conclusion it has been another busy quarter. The main focus of our work has been to recruit more foster carers and will continue to be so in order to meet our target of recruiting 10 more foster carers (net gain) by the end of the financial year.
33. The number of foster carers has increased (net gain) by 3 since April 2014, there are potentially 8 more foster carers being presented to panel between January and March 2015, which will hopefully help to ensure we reach the target of 10 additional foster carers. This is, however, dependent on how many of our current family and friends carers placement status change as they proceed with S.G.O. assessments. Regardless of the target set, the Fostering Agency, along with the support of the Placement and Resource Team, has been successful in expanding the approval range/capacity of our in house foster carers. The fees scheme has helped to encourage existing foster carers to consider giving up work and take on more children, which has reduced our reliance on I.F.A. placements and therefore reduced placement costs significantly. As referred to paragraph 23, we now have 54% of children placed with in-house carers compared to 45% for the same time last year. With further foster carers due to be presented to panel shortly, it is envisioned our use of I.F.A. placements will reduce further.
34. The fees scheme has also meant that the agency is now able to compete with neighbouring Local Authorities and with I.F.A.'s and this is evidenced in the number of I.F.A. carers who are now approaching C.B.C. with a view to transferring.

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

None

This page is intentionally left blank