

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 25 June 2015

NOTICE OF MEETING

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Date & Time

Monday, 6 July 2015 at 10.00 a.m.

Venue at

Room 14, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford

Richard Carr
Chief Executive

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

Elected Members (voting)

Cllrs C Hegley (Chairman), Mrs A L Dodwell (Vice-Chairman), Mrs A Barker,
N B Costin, Mrs A L Dodwell, Mrs S A Goodchild, C Hegley, T Stock,
M A G Versallion and B Wells

[Named Substitutes:

Cllrs D Bowater, I Dalgarno, Mrs J Freeman and K Janes]

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.

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AGENDA

1. **Apologies for Absence**

To receive any apologies for absence and notification of substitute Members.

2. **Minutes**

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 23 March 2015 (copy attached).

3. **Members' Interests**

To receive from Members any declarations of interest.

4. **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

To receive any announcements from the Chairman and any matters of communication.

Reports

Item	Subject	Page Nos.
5.	Fees and Allowances for Foster Carers To consider a review of the foster care allowance scheme with the aim of increasing remuneration to foster carers and addressing the high use of independent foster agency placements.	* 21 - 28
6.	Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2014-15 To consider a report outlining the activity of the Independent Reviewing Officers/Conference and Review Service in relation to the reviews of Looked After Children during 2014-15.	+ To Follow
7.	Fostering Agency 2014/2015 Quarter 4 Performance Report To consider the Fostering Agency Quarter 4 Performance Report for 2014/15.	* 29 - 36

8. **Fostering Agency Annual Report for the Period 2014/2015** * 37 - 66

To consider the 2014/15 Annual Report for the Fostering Agency.

9. **Adoption Agency Annual Report** * 67 - 90

To consider the Adoption Agency's Annual Report for 2014/15.

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Council Chamber, Priory House, Chicksands, Shefford on Monday, 23 March 2015

PRESENT

Elected Members (voting)

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

Officers (voting)

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

Carers (non-voting)

Mrs D Addams
Ms N Banks

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

Mrs A Barker
N J Sheppard

Officers (voting)

Mrs J Dickinson, Head of Leisure and Libraries
Mrs S Harrison, Director of Children's Services

Carers (voting)

Mrs H Philips MBE, Foster Carer
Mr D Thorne, Foster Carer

Members in Attendance: Cllr R D Berry

Officers in Attendance:	Mr A Ahmed	– Team Manager 13+Transition & Leaving Care
	Ms S Hall	– Social Worker
	Mr G Jones	– Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
	Mr L Manning	– Committee Services Officer
	Miss H Redding	– Assistant Director School Improvement
	Mr E Wong	– Head of Corporate Parenting

Others in Attendance: Children in Care
Council
Representatives

CPP/14/42. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 2 February 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CPP/14/43. **Members' Interests**

No interests were declared.

CPP/14/44. **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman informed the Panel that Councillor A Shadbolt, a long serving member of the Council, had died the evening before. The Panel's thoughts were with Councillor Shadbolt's family and friends on this sad occasion.

CPP/14/45. **Children in Care Council and Participation 2014-2015**

The Panel considered the Children in Care Council's (CiCC's) Annual Report for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015. The aim of the report was to summarise and evaluate the work undertaken by the CiCC and the Participation Officer during this period.

The Panel also received a presentation from the CiCC which complemented the Annual Report

A slide pack for the presentation was circulated and a copy is attached at Appendix A to these minutes.

The CiCC representatives worked through the presentation, each taking turns to introduce sections. At the conclusion the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations suggested that the Panel recognise the efforts of the CiCC representatives and thank them accordingly. The Chairman, on behalf of the Panel, concurred with this suggestion.

A Member referred to the use of acronyms within both the report and presentation and requested that officers provide a full explanation of an acronym's meaning in future documents. In response the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations apologised for this occurrence and undertook to ensure that this situation was not repeated.

The Vice-Chairman sought the CiCC representatives' views on their level of involvement in the development of the Passport to Independence. A CiCC representative stated that she had actively participated and had attended a

meeting with Housing officers. The Team Manager 13+ Transition and Leaving Care added that support from the Housing team had been excellent and officers had encouraged participation.

The Director of Social Care, Health and Housing then asked the CiCC representatives what single matter had made the biggest difference to them over the past year. In response one of the representatives explained how she was able to draw on her own experience to prepare a booklet which could be used by other Looked After Children going through a similar experience. Another representative referred to work undertaken on the Passport for Independence.

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations referred to the Young Voices group and how he and the Chief Executive of the Council had played Jenga with some of the young people as a means to overcome boundaries and encourage them to talk about aspects of their lives. A foster carer representative said she was unaware of the group and sought information on how younger people found out about it. In response a CiCC representative explained that notification was made by letter and recruitment days arranged. Another CiCC representative stated that this information would also be available on the website when it became available. Discussion followed during which the Head of Corporate Parenting undertook to establish why the foster carer had not received information on the Young Voices group. With regard to the website, the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations acknowledged that there had been a substantial delay in its implementation but he felt that any problems had been overcome and the website would soon be available.

The Chairman expressed his thanks and stated that the Panel fully recognised the commitment of the CiCC representatives. The presentation had illustrated the CiCC's achievements and he asked that the CiCC representatives take a message back to their colleagues of the pride felt by the Panel. The Chairman also thanked the representatives for their honesty and willingness to share their views and encouraged them to continue to do so. He concluded by thanking, on behalf of the Panel, the CiCC for its contribution. In response the CiCC representatives thanked the Panel for permitting them to participate.

A CiCC representative asked if Members and officers had found that working with the CiCC had been helpful. In response the Chairman stated that it had been valuable whilst the Director of Social Care, Health and Housing referred specifically to how the CiCC's comments on Looked After Children and young people's housing provision had galvanised both her and the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations to change their approach on this issue. She added that she had been impressed with their contribution in general.

A Member expressed his congratulations to one of the CiCC representatives, an unaccompanied asylum seeker, for his English language skills given that he had only been resident in the UK for seven months.

Another Member referred to his own experience in encouraging young people to participate and take control of their lives. He also acknowledged how difficult it was to appear before a meeting such as the Panel but hoped that their

attendance would continue and that more young people would attend in the future.

NOTED

- 1 the Children in Care Council and Participation Annual Report 2014-2015;**
- 2 the presentation by the Children in Care Council representatives.**

RESOLVED

that the efforts of the Children in Care Council representatives be recognised and they be thanked for their contribution.

(Note: At the conclusion of this item the Children in Care Council representatives left the meeting).

CPP/14/46. Report of the Virtual School for Looked After Children

The Panel considered a report from the Director of Children's Services which explained the role of the Central Bedfordshire Virtual School, the confirmed educational outcomes for Looked After Children in the academic year 2013/14 and the measures taken in the current academic year 2014/15, in partnership with other agencies, to raise the achievement and progress of all Looked After Children.

The Assistant Director School Improvement introduced the report which, she explained, contained results which had now been validated. She then worked through the report, which covered the following matters, highlighting issues she felt to be of particular interest:

- Issues
- Background
- Exclusions
- Attendance
- Pupil's Achievement
- Governance
- Priority Actions for 2014/15

The Assistant Director School Improvement then updated the Panel on recent developments regarding targeted support including additional support for foster carers, the extension of the Pupil Premium into early years and moving the Virtual School predominantly online. She also referred to the appointment of a Personal Advisor in the Virtual School to work three days a week tracking the progress of Looked After Children and to the Virtual School Head's invitation to speak to Education Inspectors on the role of the Virtual School.

A Member then raised a number of queries. In response the Assistant Director School Improvement confirmed that the Pupil Premium needed to be spent by

the end of the financial year or would be returned to the department for Education. She added that the monies were almost fully spent. With regard to the Premium's use to support group learning the Assistant Director School Improvement stated that it had funded individual pupils too date. She emphasised that every child was regarded as an individual and the Virtual School had adopted this approach in its service provision. It was recognised that pupils' needs varied on a year by year basis and so the focus needed to be individuals.

The Panel's attention was drawn to the absence of a comparative 2013 percentage figure from paragraph 26 of the report which dealt with Looked After Children achieving the expected level in reading, writing and mathematics for the year ending 31 March 2014. In response the Assistant Director School Improvement undertook to supply this information.

Further discussion took place regarding pupils' achievement under the Key Stage 4 Results for 2014. The Assistant Director School Improvement explained that one area which required examination related to those children who came late into care and hadn't developed academically due to the adverse background impacting on their emotional health and wellbeing.

A foster carer commented that the Virtual School was the most pro-active that she had been in contact with and expressed her thanks for this.

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations commented on the improved content and greater detail of the reports on the Virtual School over the last two years and paid tribute to the Assistant Director School Improvement and the Virtual School Head for their leadership and control in this area.

Following further discussion and comment the Chairman, on behalf of the Panel, asked that the Panel's congratulations be taken back and shared with the Virtual School Head for the improvements which had been made.

NOTED

the outcomes for Looked After Children in the academic year 2013/14 and the impact of the measures taken since September 2014 to develop the role of the Virtual School in order to improve outcomes for Looked After Children and young people.

CPP/14/47. Presentation of Unit Award Statements

(Note: At the beginning of this item three of the Children in Care Council representatives returned to the meeting).

On behalf of the Panel, the Chairman presented Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) Unit Award Statements to Charlotte Chapman, Emily Smith and Rebeka Hillyard of the Children in Care Council in recognition of their work in helping to train some of Central Bedfordshire Council's social

workers during the latter's Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE).

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 11.12 a.m.)



Children in Care Council



The CiCC & Young Voices

- We currently have around 24 young people involved in the CiCC and participation activities. We are a mixed age range from 16 – 22.
- The Young Voices group is for 8 – 15 year olds. We have around 29 young people who are involved in this group. Young Voices are involved in activity based participation as well as consultation based participation.

CiCC

	16-18	18-21	21+
Male	4	10	1
Female	1	4	4

Young Voices

	8-12	13-15
Male	13	3
Female	11	2



CiCC Achievements

- **Awards** - this was the biggest event to date with 108 young people receiving their award on the night and over 200 young people being nominated.



- **Recruitment Involvement** – We have been involved with the recruitment of a number of permanent staff including managers and social workers.

CiCC Achievements

- **Working with the Commissioning Service** – We have been part of the tendering process for the Independent Visitors and Advocates and the supported housing providers.
- **Children's Commissioner** – Rebeka and Amy have been attending meetings with the Children's Commissioner's Participation Group and worked on the My Care Survey.
- **Summer activities** – There were activity days organised in the summer holidays where 36 young people attended at least one day, these included horse riding, a trip to the cinema and a trip to Gulliver's. The activities are very popular and members of the CiCC attend to act as peer mentors and take part in informal consultations.



CiCC Achievements

- **Peer Mentoring** – Members of the CiCC have continued to act as peer mentors with the young voices group, this has included a meeting with Richard Carr and Gerard Jones about what young voices feel about certain aspects of their life, what they like and what they feel needs improving such as better facilities for visiting families in centres and not having lots of different social workers. We also had a brilliant game of Jenga to get to know everyone.
- **Shadowing the Chief Executive** – I (Charlotte) was invited to shadow Richard Carr during his Management Group meeting, this was a really good opportunity which gave me an idea of what the council does.
- **The Frontline Programme** – We were part of the training of over 120 social work students on the Frontline Programme.
- **Consultations** – This has included consultations on the Passport to Independence, the awards, summer activities and the corporate parenting strategy.

CiCC Achievements

- **Training days for ASYE** – We have developed a training day for ASYEs which we deliver. This looks at what participation is and why it is important, it also looks at the way in which workers communicate. We help them to develop a social workers tool box to show why they wanted to become a social worker and inside are the tools they need to be a good social worker.
- **Consultation booklets** – We have worked with the Conference and Review Service to renew the consultation booklets for children who are looked after. Younger looked after children told us that they preferred to have space to draw and to have tick boxes for some of the questions. We have brought you some booklets for you to see.



CiCC Achievements

- **Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Consultation Group**
 - My Name is Dejen and I am part of a new group representing unaccompanied asylum seeking children, we started meeting in November and now meet every 6 weeks. 10 young people attend the meeting with our interpreters a manager and other workers.
- **The Group Discussions** – we talk about any problem we may have and workers explain how they can help, this could be about support with education, joining the gym, attending church in London, or about learning independence skills.
- **We said, you did** –
 - ✓ We asked for bikes and were supported to pass a cycling proficiency tests.
 - ✓ We asked to be supported to access leisure activities and we have had football coaching.
 - ✓ We requested support for education and Lucy Wanji talked to us about improving our grades, a teacher is now helping new learners with English.
 - ✓ We wanted to develop our independence skills and some of us are going to start a programme.
 - ✓ We enjoy attending the meetings and think they are helpful.

Future Plans

- **CiCC Meetings** – we are planning monthly meetings and planning ways so more CiCC members can attend, including young people representing the Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers.
- **Meetings with Senior Managers**– regular meetings with Richard Carr, Sue Harrison, Gerard Jones, Edward Wong and Team Managers.
- **Pledge** - We would like to work with members of the Corporate Parenting Panel to update The Pledge.
- **Consultation** – Consultation topics will be agreed with service areas and the CiCC, a consultation day is being arranged with the IROs and Young Voices group on the LAC review process.
- **Newsletter** – the newsletter is being written by members of the CiCC and is sent to all looked after children, we now include Sue Harrison's Blog

CICC Future Plans

- **Leaving care packs** – The leaving care packs are a priority this year, so young people leaving care are provided with a friendly informative way of knowing what they are entitled to at what age and also ways to contact people such as housing and other services that could help us.
- **Website** – We are working on the Website and think this will be a way to develop our consultation with young people placed out of the local authority.
- **Consultation with young people in residential units placed out of the local authority** – Working with the commissioning service to develop information booklets and ways of consultation.

Thank you for listening.

Any Questions?

Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

6 July 2015

FEES AND ALLOWANCES FOR FOSTER CARERS

Report of Cllr Carole Hegley, Executive Member for Social Care and Housing
(carole.hegley@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

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

Purpose of this report

The report outlines a review of the foster care allowance scheme to increase remuneration to council foster carers and address the high use of independent foster agency placements.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is asked to:

Consider revising the new foster fee scheme to accommodate various amendments incorporated below. The revised scheme enhances the management of sufficiency and affordability of placement for looked after children and recognises that payments should reflect appropriate skills.

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

1. Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be invited to consider and comment on this report at its meeting on 18 August 2015.

Background

2. The Council has a duty to provide a range of types of placements for looked after children which meet their needs. In most cases a child's needs should be met by living in a family setting, either with someone known to them (known as a friends and family or connected person foster placement) or with foster carers.
3. The Council recruits its own foster carers, known as 'in-house' foster carers and also has the legal responsibility for assessing and approving friends and family foster carers. In order to meet the demand for placements for children in care, foster placements are also bought from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). Central Bedfordshire Council, in conjunction with Luton Borough Council and Bedford Borough Council has

a Framework Agreement with 18 such agencies to offer suitable and sufficient IFA placements within a tight cost and quality framework.

Purpose of the New Fostering Fees Scheme

4. As at February 2015, the current average cost of Independent Fostering providers is £800 per week (£41,600 per year). In contrast, the current average cost of an in-house placement is £350 per week (£18,200 per year). This presents a current cost difference of £23,400 per year. It is Council's intention to continue to increase the number of in-house placements and reduce the number of more expensive Independent Fostering placements.
5. In September 2013, the Executive Committee agreed a plan to increase in-house foster carer recruitment and to retain existing carers through the introduction of a fee based scheme to improve rewards to in-house carers. This scheme costs an additional £499,000 per year to the Council.
6. From 01 April 2014 the Council have paid the following fees to eligible foster carers in addition to the allowance paid to Tier 1 Carers;
 - Tier 2 carers receive a fee of £100 per week per child placed
 - Tier 3 carers receive a fee of £175 per week per child placed
 - Tier 4 youth carers receive a fee of £175 per week per child in addition to their agreed allowance

From 01 July 2015 we propose the following amendment to the fees paid to foster carers;

- All foster carers (Tier 1) will be paid a rate equivalent to the Fostering Network recommended minimum allowance plus 10%
- Tier 2 carers (previously called Tier 1) will receive £100 per week per child placed in addition to Fostering Network Rates
- Tier 3 carers (previously called Tier 2) will receive £175 per week per child placed in addition to Fostering Network Rates
- The existing Youth Carer scheme will receive £385 per week per child in addition to the allowance paid to Tier 1 Carers

This amendment will ensure that all carers be they career carers or family and friends carers are treated the same and have the same opportunities to enhance their skills through the appropriate training process.

7. This approach recognises the training and assessment that Carers undertake to carry out their tasks and responsibilities, together with their experience, especially in so far as they take on the care of a variety of different children in placements for task centred fostering. Fostering

allowances will continue to be based on the annually updated Fostering Network rates.

8. On 31 March 2015 there were 274 children Looked After (LAC) by Central Bedfordshire Council, with 195 children placed with either in-house or independent agency foster family. This represents 71% of the LAC population placed with foster carers, which compares reasonably with the statistical neighbours figure of 75%.
9. It was a primary objective of the New Fee Scheme to increase the proportion of children in care placed in-house. As can be seen above this has already been achieved within a year of the new arrangement being introduced. It was also an objective to increase the number of in-house placements by 10 in the first year and 15 in the subsequent year. This target set for the first year has been achieved.
10. The age profile of children placed with foster carer's shows the need for additional carers for children under the age of 10 years. However, more carers are needed for all age ranges particularly for sibling groups of children.

Table 1: Age Profile of Children in Care in Foster Placements at 31 March

Age	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4	Special Cases	Total in house	IFA	Total
0 to 4	16	5	13			34	10	44
5 to 10	13	3	15		2	33	38	71
11 to 15	7	3	14	5		29	36	65
16+	3		3	3		9	6	15
Total	39	11	45	8	2	105	90	195

Summary of Planned Increase in In-house Foster Carers

	At 31 Jan 14	At 31 Mar 15
Number of children placed in house	95	105

When the scheme was tabled in January 2014 it was planned that:

- There would be 105 in-house placements by 31 March 2015. The table above confirms this has been achieved. In financial terms the additional cost of each IFA placement is £23,400, so the fully annualised effect of 10 placements in-house as opposed to IFA is £234,000.

- It is planned that the number of in-house placements will increase by a further 15 to 120 by 31 March 2016.
11. 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 Revised Scheme

12. Tier 1 -

This level is intended for those carers who have not carried out the appropriate training required to become eligible for the Tier 2 Foster Carer rates. Typically, this will be a Carer who is looking after a specific child or children (possibly as a family or friend placement) and is solely approved for that specific child or children. In this instance fostering allowances are currently paid at 110% of the Fostering Network recommended rate.

It is recommended that this payment level should continue to cover the costs for the child, and would be the payment made to those carers who have not yet become eligible for Tier 2 or Tier 3 by attaining the requirements detailed below. Once approved as Tier 1 Carers, they will be eligible to complete basic training to satisfy the Training Development Standards, as well as core training such as First Aid, Safeguarding and Safer Caring.

13. Tier 2 -

This level applies to approved 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 will be paid to Tier 2 carers for each child placed with them. They will also complete a Personal Development Plan that identifies specific learning and development needs and how these will be accomplished. Carers who cease to meet the required standards will be reduced to a lower tier. The fostering allowance is paid at Fostering Network rates, according to the age bands as published annually.

14. Tier 3 –

Carers must have been fostering for two years at Tier 2 and complete their Training Support and Development (TSD) mandatory workforce development standards before progressing to Tier 3. 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.

15. Tier 4 – 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.

16. Table 2 Summary of weekly Fees and Allowances for 2015-16

Age range	Fostering Network baseline	Tier 1 (no fee) Allowance	Tier 2 £100 fee + Allowance	Tier 3 £175 fee + Allowance	Tier 4 £385 fee + Allowance
0 to 4	£142.87	£157.15	£242.87	£317.87	
5 to 10	£162.75	£179.06	£262.75	£337.75	
11 to 15	£202.58	£222.88	£302.58	£377.58	£607.88
16+	£246.47	£271.11	£346.47	£421.47	£656.11

17. Table 3 Cost of In-House Placements

The weekly cost of placing the children with in-house foster carers applying the above rates to the number of children analysed in paragraph 10 above is:

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4	Special Cases
0 to 4	2,514	1,214	4,132	0	
5 to 10	2,328	788	5,066	0	894
11 to 15	1,560	908	5,286	3,039	
16+	813	0	1,264	1,968	
Total	£7,216	£2,910	£15,749	£5,008	£894

Full weekly cost £31,777
Full annual cost £1,652,395

18. 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 (each child placed with an in-house carer results in a cost reduction of £23,400 per year compared to an Agency placement (figures calculated at current average rates)
- 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
- Encourage foster carers to increase the number of children they wish to foster to take advantage of the increased fee income available
- Increase the provision of in-house placements and reduce the use of IFA placements by 25 over the two years to 31 March 2016

Council Priorities

19. Central Bedfordshire Council's Strategic Plan 2012-16 Priority 3 – Promote health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable.

20. The Children and Young People's Plan 2011-2014 Priority 2 – Protecting children and keeping them safe.
21. Providing a sufficient number and range of foster placements is a key statutory responsibility to Looked After Children

Corporate Implications

Risk Management:

22. Regulatory Risks: The provision of sufficient and suitable foster placements is a key activity monitored by Ofsted during inspection, forming part of their judgement about services for Looked After Children.
23. Child Protection Risks: Failure to recruit or retain sufficient foster carers would be a child protection risk.
24. Reputational Risk: Recruitment of foster carers is a competitive market activity and has a high media profile.
25. Financial Risk: Looked after Children placements is a demand led activity. Independent Agency Placements are high cost, and variations in the proportion of independent versus in-house placements can have significant and immediate impact on forecast spend.

Legal Implications

26. The Children Act 1989 identifies a statutory duty for Local Authorities to provide sufficient accommodation in their local area and to provide maintenance for children who are looked after.
27. The Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011, associated Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards outline the Local Authority's responsibility to ensure that foster carers are given clear information about the allowances, fees and expenses available to them. The allowance must be sufficient to cover the cost of caring for a child placed with them and must be reviewed annually.
28. The Local Authority must provide support to all foster carers according to objective criteria that do not discriminate against foster carers that have a pre-existing relationship with the child.

Financial Implications

29. Impact per report dated 24 March 2014
30. Overheads for the Fostering Service are fixed and will not be increased as a result of the proposed increase in number of in-house placements.

31. The increased cost of implementing the Fee scheme with current number of in-house placements is £298,000. This is cost incurred before any growth in foster placements. The increased cost of a further 10 placements in 2014-15 is an additional £144,000. Adding these together, the proposed increase fits within the agreed cost for 2014-15 of £499,000.
32. For the year 2015-16, the increase of a further 15 in-house placements is costed at £218,000.

Outcome to 31 June 2015

33. The New Foster Scheme has achieved all the targets set for the first year.

Impact of proposed variation

34. The proposed variation clarifies the rate of allowance to be paid to Foster Carers in their respective tier bands and reflects that payments reflect appropriate skills. It will have no direct financial impact.

Equalities Implications

35. Fostering allowances must meet the cost of caring for a child. The allowance scheme must ensure that any additional costs incurred in caring for a disabled child or a child with other specific needs is met.

Conclusion and next Steps

36. The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to note progress on the development and agree the implementation of the revisions proposed to the fostering fees scheme.

Appendices

None.

Background Papers

The Fees and Allowances for Foster Carers, 24 March 2014 has been used for the basis of this update.

Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

6 July 2015

FOSTERING AGENCY 2014/2015 QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE REPORT

Report of Cllr Carole Hegley, Executive Member for Social Care and Housing
(carole.hegley@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Advising Officers: Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services
(sue.harrison@central.bedfordshire.gov.uk)

Annie Craig, Practice Manager, Fostering
(annie.craig@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Purpose of this report:

For the Panel to note the contents and agree the Fostering Agency 2014/15 Quarter 4 Performance Report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel is asked to:

1. Consider and note the Fostering Agency 2014/15 Quarter 4 Performance Report.

Background

1. 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 fourth quarter report for the financial year 2014/2015.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

2. During January, February and March 2015, a variety of recruitment activities/events took place in line with the Fostering Services recruitment strategy.
3. Outreach including attendance at 2 Child-minders support groups; a Community Engagement event at DISC (Defence Intelligence & Security Centre); Bedford Hospital; Luton & Dunstable Hospital; Vilukush Sheikh Women's Group; an Inspire event targeting people from LGTB (Lesbian

Gay Transgender and Bisexual) and at an Integrated Youth Service staff meeting where leaflets and flyers were handed out. An information evening about fostering was also held in Flitwick.

4. In relation to advertising, an advert was placed on Heart FM Radio looking at the rewards of fostering from the foster carers perspective. This was as a follow up from an advert placed in December which focussed on fostering from the child in care perspective.
5. Leaflets and posters were sent to: Bedford Italian Society; Bedford African and Caribbean Forum; Bedford Polish Society; Bedford Council of Faiths; Shefford Scouts; a Turkish School where one of our LAC children attends; Under 18's football clubs in the CBC/Luton area; to 7 Youth Zones (Youth clubs) in the Luton area; to Red MV, which is a youth organisation that provides training and events for young people; Sainsbury's in Biggleswade; Tesco (in Dunstable Bedford and Shortstown); Potton Baptist Church; Biggleswade Youth Club and more leaflets and posters were delivered to Keech Hospice in Luton. Posters and Leaflets were sent electronically to Bedfordshire Clinical Group so that they could distribute posters electronically to all GP surgeries. On-line advertisements were also placed in Bedford and Dunstable Today as well as on-line advertisements in Bedford Times and Citizen and Luton News advertising forthcoming Information Evenings.
6. On-line posts on Facebook have been promoted throughout this quarter either advertising forthcoming Information Evenings/Events or promoting the need to recruit foster care from the general public. As a result of the recruitment drive during this period we received a total of 56 enquiries (21 more than in the last quarter). There were 36 in January, 7 in February and 13 in March. There were 29 Initial Visits during this period, 8 in January, 12 in February and 9 in March. There were 8 application forms received during this period. 1 for January, 6 for February and 1 for March (1 more than in the last quarter).

Assessments

7. As of the 31 March 2015 there were 20 assessments in progress, 7 for career carers, 2 Regulation 24 (emergency family and friends), 7 full family and friends/connected persons and 4 SGO (Special Guardianship Order) assessments.
8. During this quarter 12 families were approved to foster, 8 were career carers providing a variety of long term, short term, respite or emergency care, 4 family and friends carers were approved to care for a total of 6 children.
9. As of the 31 March 2015 the Fostering Agency had a total of 105 fostering households (compared to 95 at the end of March 2014). 77 of these carers were career carers (compared to 68 at the end of March

2014) and 28 Family and Friends/Regulation 24 (compared to 25 at the end of March 2014).

10. At the beginning of April 2014 the Fostering Agency were set a target to recruit a 10 net gain of foster carers for the year. This target has been met. Not only has this target been met but the service has significantly increased the number of placements provided in house compared to children being placed in Independent Foster Agency (IFA) placements.

Date:	In House Placements	IFA Placements
As 1/4/2014	93 = 46%	108 = 54%
As 31.3.2015	106 = 54%	90 = 46%
	Increase = 14%	Decrease = 17%

This has been achieved not only by the increase in the number of career carers being approved, but also being able to support the current in house foster carers to consider changes in their approval so as to enable them to care for a wider variety of children and increase the number of children they can care for. This has enabled CBC to make significant savings in terms of placement costs as more children have been accommodated in house which is a much cheaper option than placing children in IFA placements. As a result of this success a further full time equivalent supervising social worker will need to be budgeted for in the near future in order to be able to appropriately support the additional foster carers being approved.

11. Up until mid February 2015 the Fostering Service were supporting 3 Private Foster Carers who between them were caring for 7 children. Private Fostering is now managed by the Family Support Service who take responsibility for assessing and supporting Private Foster Carers as well as promoting Private Fostering with other professionals and the general public.
12. As at 31 March 2015 there were 114 Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) in place (compared to 81 at the end of March 2014). The majority of the SGO's granted were to Family and Friends and 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 SGO's, the number of children in care would have increased significantly.

Referrals/Placement

13. During January, February and March 35 new fostering placements were made; 14 in January, 12 in February and 9 in March. This is an increase of 17 new placements compared to the last quarter. Out of the 35 new placements, 27 were placed in-house. The young people placed in IFA placements were mainly asylum seekers who needed carers who could better meet their cultural/language needs i.e. Turkish and Kurdish young

people. There was also an Asian/Pakistani sibling group of 3 that needed to be placed together, but there were no suitable in-house resource. This figure also included a 15 year old young person who was placed in a parent and child placement with her new born baby.

Training

14. During January, February and March 16 training courses took place. Courses covered topics such as first aid, Asperger's and Autism, TSD (Training Standard and Development) standards, delegated authority, safer caring supporting the health of LAC, contact and working with birth families, allegations, crisis intervention, managing and supporting transition and endings, hidden harm, impact of drugs and alcohol use on families, supporting educational potential, Family and Friends preparation training and skills to foster preparation training.
15. As of the 31 March there were 69 fostering households that had completed their mandatory TSD standards; 21 households were yet to complete their portfolios but still had time to address within the required timescales. 2 households were overdue in completing the TSD standards and were outside the required timescale. Social workers and the Training and Development Officer were providing additional support to help these carers achieve these standards.

Ofsted Notifications

16. Whenever a significant event happens, i.e. a child goes missing from placement or a serious incident/accident occurs the agency have to report these to Ofsted. During this period there were 2 notifications; both in February. The first one was a young person who absconded from their placement. Initially his whereabouts were unknown but the police identified where he was staying, however, after visiting the young person and completing a risk assessment the young person remained and did not return to the foster placement.
17. The second notification was in relation to a young person who left school without authorisation and did not return to the foster carer's home. The Missing Persons Unit was informed/involved. The young person was located with family members in Peterborough 6 days later and was returned to his foster placement.

Allegations

18. During this period there was 1 'anonymous' allegation made (February) against a Regulation 24 (Temporarily Approved) foster carer. The caller stated that the female carer was aggressive towards the children in her care, that she had witnessed the carer hit one of the children at Christmas and pulled her leg whilst trying to change her nappy. The LADO (Local Area Designated Officer) was consulted, and it was agreed this did not reach the threshold to be dealt with as an allegation. It was

therefore dealt with as a concern, a concerns meeting was held as well as a complex case discussion. The child's social worker and fostering social worker visited and a further concerns meeting is due to be held shortly to decide what action, if any, is needed.

Complaints

19. During this period the service received 2 complaints (both in March). One complaint was from a Guardian complaining about the care a child received from a foster carer. This was fully investigated and dealt with in timescale. There were a number of complaints raised and the outcome was that only one part of the complaint was upheld, one was partially upheld and the others were not upheld.
20. The second complaint was from a birth father concerned about Facebook entries on the family/friends foster carers Facebook account. A Joint Evaluation Meeting (JEM) was held where concerns were raised that it may have been the birth father that fabricated the issue, had hacked into the carer's account and edited her Facebook account. The police and Facebook were contacted regarding the concerns and no further action was taken against the foster carer.

Compliments

21. During this period 3 compliments were received about the fostering service.
 - One was from a foster carer who attended the Talktime meeting where foster carers have an opportunity to meet with senior managers and discuss fostering issues. She wrote to say how much she enjoyed the meeting and "how refreshing it was to discuss matters so dear to foster carers hearts and to feel heard"
 - The second compliment was from a childcare social worker regarding one of the foster carers she had worked with. She said "thanks so much for your hard work with E, it has not gone unnoticed and I hope I get to work with you in the future".
 - The third compliment was from the Fostering Panel regarding an assessment that had been completed by one of the fostering social workers. Panel felt that the assessment was extremely well written and presented well.

Staffing

22. 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 (Full Time Equivalent) 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.

Council Priorities

23. 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.

Corporate Implications

Risk Management:

24. Regulatory Risks: The provision of sufficient and suitable foster placements is a key activity monitored by Ofsted during inspection, forming part of their judgement about services for Looked After Children.

Child Protection Risks: Failure to recruit or retain sufficient foster carers would be a child protection risk.

Reputational Risk: Recruitment of foster carers is a competitive market activity and has a high media profile.

Financial Risk: Looked after Children placements is a demand led activity. Independent Agency Placements are high cost, and variations in the proportion of independent versus in-house placements can have significant and immediate impact on forecast spend.

Legal Implications

25. The Children Act 1989 identifies a statutory duty for Local Authorities to provide sufficient accommodation in their local area and to provide maintenance for children who are looked after.

The Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011, associated Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards outline the Local Authority's responsibility to ensure that foster carers are given clear information about the allowances, fees and expenses available to

them. The allowance must be sufficient to cover the cost of caring for a child placed with them and must be reviewed annually.

The Local Authority must provide support to all foster carers according to objective criteria that do not discriminate against foster carers that have a pre-existing relationship with the child.

Financial Implications

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

Equalities Implications

27. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

In order to ensure the best possible outcomes for children who are fostered the service needs to;

- Recruit and retain foster carers from a variety of different backgrounds and cultures
- Provide a range of training and support opportunities to foster carers which includes consideration of equality and diversity requirements
- Ensure appropriate cultural support and other expertise related to the protected characteristics is in place and reflects the different needs of children and young people
- Check the extent to which positive outcomes are achieved for different groups within the service
- Ensure that allegations related to discrimination and harassment are investigated and addressed
- Create and maintain a work place where all employees are treated with dignity and respect and promote equality of opportunity for foster carers, children and young people

Community Safety

28. Not applicable.

Sustainability

29. Not applicable.

Procurement

30. Not applicable.

Conclusion and next Steps

31. In conclusion it has been another busy quarter. Whilst the main focus of our work has been to recruit more foster carers and meet the recruitment target which has now been achieved, the fostering service has also strived to support existing foster carers to ensure they receive a good service, that when issues/difficulties arise that these are addressed swiftly and that foster carers feel part of a service that is developing and sensitive to their needs as well as child focussed. In preparation for the fostering services new recruitment target for 2015/16 to recruit a net gain of 15 foster carers work has also been completed this period to review the existing recruitment strategy and update it in view of our current needs.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

None

Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

6 July 2015

**FOSTERING AGENCY ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE PERIOD
2014/2015**

Report of Cllr Carole Hegley, Executive Member for Social Care and Housing
(carole.hegley@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

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

Annie Craig, Practice Manager, Fostering
(annie.craig@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Purpose of this report:

This report introduces the Fostering Agency Annual Report for Members to consider and note.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel is asked to:

1. Consider and note the Fostering Agency Annual Report.

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

1. The annual report for fostering will need to be presented to Overview and Scrutiny to note the contents and provide feedback.

Background

2. The Council has a duty to provide a range of types of placements for looked after children which meet their needs. In most cases a child needs should be met by living in a family setting, either with someone known to them (known as a friends and family or connected person foster placement) or with foster carers.
3. The Council recruits its own foster carers, known as 'in-house' foster carers and also has the legal responsibility for assessing and approving friends and family foster carers. In order to meet the demand for placements for children in care, foster placements are also bought from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). Central Bedfordshire Council, in conjunction with Luton Borough Council and Bedford Borough Council has

a Framework Agreement with 18 such agencies to offer suitable and sufficient IFA placements within a tight cost and quality framework.

Council Priorities

4. Central Bedfordshire Council's Strategic Plan 2012-16 Priority 3 – Promote health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable
5. The Children and Young People's Plan 2011-2014 Priority 2 – Protecting children and keeping them safe.
6. Providing a sufficient number and range of foster placements is a key statutory responsibility to Looked After Children

Corporate Implications

Risk Management:

7. Regulatory Risks: The provision of sufficient and suitable foster placements is a key activity monitored by Ofsted during inspection, forming part of their judgement about services for Looked After Children.
8. Child Protection Risks: Failure to recruit or retain sufficient foster carers would be a child protection risk.
9. Reputational Risk: Recruitment of foster carers is a competitive market activity and has a high media profile.
10. Financial Risk: Looked after Children placements is a demand led activity. Independent Agency Placements are high cost, and variations in the proportion of independent versus in-house placements can have significant and immediate impact on forecast spend.

Legal Implications

11. The Children Act 1989 identifies a statutory duty for Local Authorities to provide sufficient accommodation in their local area and to provide maintenance for children who are looked after.
12. The Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011, associated Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards outline the Local Authority's responsibility to ensure that foster carers are given clear information about the allowances, fees and expenses available to them. The allowance must be sufficient to cover the cost of caring for a child placed with them and must be reviewed annually.
13. The Local Authority must provide support to all foster carers according to objective criteria that do not discriminate against foster carers that have a pre-existing relationship with the child.

Financial Implications

14. Impact per report dated 24 March 2014
15. Overheads for the Fostering Service are fixed and will not be increased as a result of the proposed increase in number of in-house placements.
16. The increased cost of implementing the Fee scheme with current number of in-house placements is £298,000. This is cost incurred before any growth in foster placements. The increased cost of a further 10 placements in 2014-15 is an additional £144,000. Adding these together, the proposed increase fits within the agreed cost for 2014-15 of £499,000.
17. For the year 2015-16, the increase of a further 15 in-house placements is costed at £218,000.

Outcome to 31 June 2015

18. The New Foster Scheme has achieved all the targets set for the first year.

Impact of proposed variation

19. The proposed variation clarifies the rate of allowance to be paid to Foster Carers in their respective tier bands and reflects that payments reflect appropriate skills. It will have no direct financial impact.

Equalities Implications

20. Fostering allowances must meet the cost of caring for a child. The allowance scheme must ensure that any additional costs incurred in caring for a disabled child or a child with other specific needs is met.

Conclusion and next Steps

21. The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to note progress on the development and agree the implementation of the revisions proposed to the fostering fees scheme.

Appendices

- Appendix A - Fostering Agency Annual Report 2014/15
- Appendix B - Fostering Panel Overview Report – Panel Chair April 2014 to March 2015
- Appendix C - Panel Activity

Background Papers

None

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Appendix A

Fostering Agency

Annual Report

**For the period
2014 - 2015**

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SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTION

- 1.0.1 This has been the first year that Central Bedfordshire Council has operated as a single agency following the disaggregation of the shared service with Bedford Borough Council on the 31st December 2013. This report describes the activities of Central Bedfordshire Council Fostering Service between the 1st April 2014 and the 31st March 2015.
- 1.0.2 The report will note the Fostering Agency's achievements, clarifying the remit and focus of its work and identify recommendations for the development of the service. Attached to the report is the Fostering Panel Chair's report and the Panel Activity Statistics.
- 1.0.3 The Fostering Service along with the Adoption Service moved to Stephenson Court in Bedford, (where they are currently based), on the 16th March 2014 becoming part of the Corporate Parenting Service.
- 1.0.4 The Fostering Service introduced a Fees Scheme for foster carers on the 1st April 2014 whereby foster carers not only received an allowance to care for any children placed but a fee on top of the allowance. This is a tiered fees scheme which relates to the foster carers length of service and training completed. It is in recognition of the work foster carers do and is hoped to encourage them to develop their skills and knowledge as foster carers.

1.1 STAFFING/SERVICE STRUCTURE

- 1.1.1 The Fostering Service was made up of the following full-time equivalent staff as of 31st March 2015:
- 1 x Practice Manager
 - 2 x Team Manager
 - 4.7 x Senior Social Workers
 - 9.4 x Social Workers
 - 1 x Senior Social Work Assistant
 - 1 x Training Co-ordinator for Fostering and Adoption
 - 1 x .81 Recruitment and Marketing Manager for Fostering and Adoption
- 1.1.2 The service is supported by 2 full time administrators.
- 1.1.3 The workforce is diverse and includes staff of both genders, and from different European and black and minority ethnic groups.
- 1.1.4 All staff have access to the Council's extensive learning and development programme, and can apply to attend external courses and conferences where appropriate. The Council's Learning and Development Programme also provides diversity training for staff in order to ensure they understand and address issues of diversity when working with foster carers and children in care. Staff are encouraged to embrace and celebrate the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.
- 1.1.5 Most staff have extensive post-qualifying experience, and a programme of induction and additional support is in place for those newly-qualified or in the early years of their social work career.
- 1.1.6 The Fostering Service is supported by specialist staff who work across the Fostering, Adoption and Placement and Resources Teams. These staff include, placement and

resource officers who are responsible for making placements and foster care payments
There is a Recruitment and Marketing Manager and Training coordinator who work across the Fostering and Adoption Services. Panel Advisors and Secretaries are also in post to support the Fostering and Permanence Panel and Adoption Panel.

SECTION 2 – THE PANELS

2.1 REPORT FROM FOSTERING PANEL CHAIR

- 2.1.1 The attached Fostering Panel Chair's Report (Appendix B), includes valuable information and feedback on the function of panel business. Statistical information regarding panel business is attached (Appendix C). All areas of improvement highlighted in the Panel Chair's Report will be taken forward in the Corporate Parenting Plan.

SECTION 3 – SPECIALISED FOSTERING

3.1 THE FAMILY LINK SCHEME

- 3.1.1 The Family Link Scheme offers short breaks to children of all ages who have a physical or functional disability. Family Link carers are foster carers who are recruited, approved and trained in the same way as other foster carers. They receive regular support and guidance from a supervising social worker.
- 3.1.2 Family Link Foster Carers can care for a child in their own home, the child's home or by taking the child to an activity. Periods of short breaks will be carefully planned and can be for a few hours occasionally or whole weekends on a regular basis.
- 3.1.3 Once agreement has been given for the care package from the Resource Panel, a careful process of matching takes place, taking into account the individual needs of the child and their family and the carer's abilities
- 3.1.4 On the 31st March 2015, there were 7 Family Link carers approved. These carers were supporting 10 children by providing regular short breaks. There was also 1 salaried family link fee-based carer who was linked to 4 children and 1 adult who had complex medical needs.

3.2 THE YOUTH CARE SCHEME

- 3.2.1 The Youth Care Scheme is a comprehensive and enhanced fee paid scheme which provides specialist care to young people over the age of 10 years who have needs which are particularly challenging or complex.
- 3.2.2 As of 31st March 2015, there were 6 approved Youth Care households, caring for 8 children.

SECTION 4 – CHILDREN AND FOSTERING

4.1 CHILDREN REFERRED FOR FOSTERING

- 4.1.1 Between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2015, the Fostering Service received a total of 281 referrals for foster placements of which 107 were for children becoming newly looked after, 94 were for a change of placement. The remainder 80 referrals did not proceed either because Section 20 agreement was withdrawn or Court Orders were not granted as anticipated.
- 4.1.2 Of the 107 newly accommodated children 54 were placed with in-house career foster carers, 22 were placed temporarily with Family and Friends foster carers under Regulation 24 (Fostering Regulations 2011) or fully approved Family and Friends foster carers, 20 were placed in Independent Fostering Agencies (I.F.A.'s), 2 were placed in children's homes, 2 were placed in parent and child units, 5 were placed in semi independent living and the remaining 2 were placed by the Police in Secure Training Centres.
- 4.1.3 The referral for the child includes the matching criteria that are essential and preferable when looking for a placement for a child, and a risk assessment is also considered. This is crucial to identifying which carers may be able to support a child. Where a placement does not meet the essential criteria or where any identified risks cannot be managed an alternative placement is sought.
- 4.1.4 Respite placements were provided as and when needed on 55 occasions. In addition 5 children had regular monthly respite as part of their care plan. Youth Care placements were provided with 16 periods of respite as part of the Youth Care agreement.
- 4.1.5 Of the new referrals for foster placements, 16 came through the Emergency Duty Service. This is the same number as the previous year although it is difficult to make comparisons with previous years as the service was shared with Bedford Borough Council until the 31st December 2013.
- 4.1.6 As at 31st March 2015 there were a total of 105 children living with in-house foster carers (compared to 93 as at 31st March 2014) and 90 living in Independent Fostering Agency provision (compared to 108 as at 31st March 2014). This represents 54% children placed with in-house carers (compared to 46% as at 31st March 2014) and 46% with I.F.A.'s (compared to 54% as at 31st March 2014) This means that over the year there has been a 14% increase in the number of children being placed in house and a 17% reduction in numbers of children in I.F.A. provision. This has been achieved not only by the increase in number of career carers being approved, but also in supporting existing foster carers to consider changes in their approval so as to enable them to care for a wider variety of children and increase the number of children they can care for. This has enabled CBC to make significant savings in terms of placement costs as more children have been accommodated in house which is a much cheaper option than placing children in I.F.A. placements. As a result of this success consideration may be needed in the next financial year regarding recruiting additional supervising social workers in order to appropriately support/supervise the additional foster carers being approved.

4.2 AGE, GENDER AND ETHNICITY OF CHILDREN REFERRED FOR FOSTERING

4.2.1 Over half the children accommodated between the 1st April 2014 and 31st April 2015 were aged 0-5 years, the age distribution was as follows:

0-5 years	55 children
6-12 years	28 children
13-18 years	24 young people

4.2.2 The age profile of children accommodated this year is similar to 2013/2014

4.2.3 Of the 107 children accommodated between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2015, 55 were female and 52 male.

4.2.4 In terms of recording of ethnicity of the 107 children accommodated between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2015, 78 were White/British, 4 were White/European, 1 was White/Traveller, was White/Black Caribbean, 1 was White/Asian, 2 were White/Other, 1 was Asian, 3 were Asian/British, 4 were Asian/Pakistani, 1 was British/Black Caribbean, 4 were Black/African, 1 was Black/British, 1 was Eritrean, 1 was Iranian, 2 were Kurdish and 2 were mixed race.

4.3 SIBLING GROUPS OF CHILDREN REFERRED FOR FOSTERING

4.3.1 There were 17 sibling groups within the children referred for fostering during the year. One of the significant criteria for matching children with carers is enabling them to be placed with siblings wherever possible. 2 of the sibling groups comprised 3 or more children. Large sibling groups are more difficult to match with suitable foster placements, particularly when seeking to place them together, which is the aim wherever possible.

4.4 CHILDREN IN PLACEMENT AT 31ST MARCH 2015

4.4.1 As at 31st March 2015, there were 105 fostering households with full fostering approval, 28 of which were Family and Friends carers (Connected Persons) or Regulation 24 carers (temporary approval).

4.4.2 As at 31st March 2015 a total of 105 children were placed with in-house foster carers (compared to 93 as of 31st March 2014), while 90 children were placed in IFA placements (compared to 108 as at 31st March 2014).

4.4.3 Central Bedfordshire Council is in a regional Framework Agreement for the commissioning of placements in Independent Fostering Agencies. This agreement sets out quality and cost standards for placements with 18 preferred providers. This agreement has enabled the Council to reduce the average costs of placements and there are clearer expectations in respect of quality and outcome for children.

4.4.4 The number of children in external placements over recent years had significantly increased, however, this trend is now changing. With the re-launch of the Fostering Service as a single agency, with the introduction of a fees scheme and with significant work being undertaken with existing foster carers to expand/increase their approval range this financial year has seen

a significant increase in the number of children placed with in house foster carers and therefore less reliance on I.F.A. placements. As at the 31st March 2015 there were 14% more children placed in house compared to 31st March 2014. As at the 31st March 2015 there were 17% less children in I.F.A. placements compared to 31st March 2014.

SECTION 5 – FOSTER CARERS

5.1 FOSTERING ENQUIRIES

- 5.1.1 In 2014/15, there were 244 enquiries by people who were interested in becoming Foster Carers compared with 164 in 2013 -14 when the Service was a shared one with Bedford Borough. This is a 49% increase and is an impressive increase considering the Service is now a single agency with half the staff in place.
- 5.1.2 The best 3 months for enquiries were May 2014 with 45, January 2015 with 36, then September with 24. The worst 3 months were August 2014 with 4, November 2014 with 6 and February 2015 with 7.

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

- 5.2.1 All assessments are carried out in accordance with the National Minimum Standards and their Statutory and Practice Guidance. All prospective foster carers are required to attend in-depth preparation training as part of the preparation and assessment process.

In terms of assessments started between April 1st 2014 and March 31st 2015 there were 109. These assessments would have been a mixture of Regulation 24 assessments, full Family and Friends assessments, Career Carer assessments or Special Guardianship assessments. During the year there were 28 requests to agree temporary approval of a connected person as a foster carer to allow an immediate placement (Regulation 24 of Care Planning, Placements and Care Review (England) Regulation 2010). 22 of these carers were given temporary approval and went on to be fully assessed as Family and Friend carers. 6 of these Regulation 24 placements were not agreed.

5.3 ETHNICITY OF CARERS

- 5.3.1 At 31st March 2015, there were a total of 192 foster carers living within 105 households. The breakdown of ethnicity regarding these carers were described as follows: 169 were White/British, 2 were White/Irish, 1 was White/European, 5 were White/Other, 3 were Asian/Indian, 5 were Black/African, 4 were Black/Caribbean, 1 was Mixed/Black, 1 was White/Black, 1 was described as Other.

SECTION 6 – TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR FOSTER CARERS

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

6.1 SKILLS TO FOSTER

6.1.1 New fostering applicants have many questions prior to and during the assessment process. As an essential part of the fostering assessment, the 'Skills to Foster' course examines issues that are relevant, such as what it will be like to have children placed with them, or working in tandem with the local authority in order to reach positive outcomes for children.

6.1.2 Spread over several dates, this course provides an opportunity for prospective carers to reflect on their values and attitudes to caring and learn more about the skills and attributes needed to become a foster carer.

6.1.3 During 2014/2015, the Fostering Service ran 3 'Skills to Foster' courses for career carers with 25 delegates attending. In addition, 3 preparation training courses were offered to family and friends foster carers with 25 delegates attending.

6.1.4 As part of the application and assessment process, all applicants must complete an Emergency First Aid course. 8 courses were held during 2014/2015 and these were attended by a total of 42 delegates.

6.2 SONS AND DAUGHTERS

6.2.1 The Fostering Service run holiday activities for sons and daughters of foster carers which are activity based and aimed to support them with the impact of fostering on their family. This year two events took place, one event was to an indoor trampoline centre (13 children attended) and the other was to a Christmas Pantomime (17 children attended).

6.3 INDUCTION

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

6.4 THE FOSTERING TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

- 6.4.1 Each year, the service devises a comprehensive training programme covering a wide range of topics to help foster carers develop their skills and knowledge. There were a total of 43 different courses on 24 subjects held over the year.
- 6.4.2 Each carer is required to have a record of their training and development needs, although other alternatives to formal training courses are encouraged in order to meet the minimum standards. This can include home study, training, reading and on-line training. This can be especially helpful for carers who find it hard to attend training dates. There is also the opportunity for carers to complete an NVQ level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People or BTEC in Advanced Foster Care Skills.
- 6.4.3 In total, 382 delegates attended training courses held over the year, which is an increase on the previous year. Whilst this was mainly approved foster carers, 78 prospective foster carers attended training and 9 others in the carers support network i.e. children of foster carers also attended some training. This demonstrates the commitment that the agency has towards training foster carers and illustrates the willingness of carers to develop their own knowledge and skill base.
- 6.4.4 As at the 31st March 2015 a total of 69 households had completed their TSD standards. 21 were yet to complete their portfolio's but still had time to address within the required timescales. 2 households were overdue in completing their TSD portfolios and social workers and the training officer were working with these households to address.

SECTION 7 – SUPPORT FOR CARERS

- 7.0.1 Every foster carer in the Service receives regular supervision and support from a Fostering Social Worker. In addition, the agency provides foster carers with an Independent Advice and Mediation Service which is provided via The Fostering Network, a national organisation for foster carers. There are local support groups held regularly for foster carers across the County and a specific support group for the Youth Carers. Social events are provided such as the annual Celebration of Fostering Event, fish and chip suppers or cheese and wine evenings. Foster carers also have access to a telephone support service out of office hours which is provided by staff from within the Fostering Service. Foster carers can also access the Bedfordshire Foster Care Association, which is run by foster carers, for foster carers.
- 7.0.2 All new carers are matched to a foster carer mentor who provides formal and practical guidance and support through the carer's first placement and beyond.

7.1 FOSTER CARER SUPPORT GROUPS

- 7.1.1 Foster Carers' Support Groups meet regularly in north, mid and south of the county. A total of 38 support groups ran during the year with 273 delegates. Additional and regular support groups were also provided for Youth Carers. Many of these support groups had speakers on relevant subjects. Although educational, foster carers were also able to enjoy socialising with other foster carers in an informal setting.
- 7.1.2 The number of Family and Friends foster carers becoming Special Guardianship Order (S.G.O.) carers is increasing year on year. As at 31st March 2015 there were 114 S.G.O.'s in

place compared to 82 as at 31st March 2014. The majority of S.G.O. carers do not receive ongoing support (apart from a financial allowance) as they access universal services. There are, however, a small number of families who contact the Service for specific support when issues arise. Between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2015 the Fostering Service worked with 29 families. The areas of support requested from families were as follows:

• Contact	10
• Behavioural management issues	7
• Financial support	6
• Support at meetings	2
• Housing	1
• Respite Care	1
• Impact on other children in the household	1
• S.G.O. breakdown	1

- 7.1.3 Support regarding the above requests has generally included phone calls, visits to the carers' home or attendance at meetings in order to support/advocate on behalf of the carers and have been very short pieces of work which have been in response to support requested.
- 7.1.4 A support group specifically for Family and Friends carers was held on 3 Saturdays in June, September and December but due to low numbers attending it is planned for 2015/16 to open this up to include other foster carers who may also benefit from attending a support group at the weekend.
- 7.1.5 Foster Carers Talk Time is organised every 3 months (previously known as the foster carers forum). These meetings give foster carers the opportunity to meet with managers and senior managers to discuss fostering issues. It also allows the Corporate Parenting Service to update foster carers on developments within the service. Following the Talk Time meeting a newsletter is sent out to all foster carers updating them of areas discussed at Talk Time as well as providing information on a whole host of other topics relevant to fostering.
- 7.1.6 The annual Foster Carers Celebration of Fostering Event was held in September 2014 which was well attended by foster carers, their children and children in care. Staff and elected members also attended, including the Chief Executive, Deputy Director for Children's Services and the Councillor with portfolio for Looked After Children. Long service awards were presented on the evening to 5 sets of foster carers who had fostered for 5 years and to 3 sets of foster carers who had fostered for 15 years. New awards were introduced this year in the following categories: Outstanding contribution to caring for children with disabilities, Outstanding contribution to Fostering, My Brilliant Foster Carer and My Brilliant Family and Friends Foster Carer.

7.2 THE MENTORING SCHEME

- 7.2.1 The Fostering Service offers peer mentoring to all new and existing carers. This service for carers, staffed by carers, offers encouragement, support, and opportunities for collaborative working. It also allows experienced foster carers the chance to develop professionally.
- 7.2.2 Carers who join the scheme are linked with a mentor who is an experienced foster carer themselves. Mentors are trained to support foster carers in their role. As well as offering support to new carers, sometimes mentoring can be offered to experienced carers when they are undergoing a particularly challenging time. The service currently has 5 mentors who have varying experiences of fostering, including age ranges and types of approval.

7.3 THE OUT OF HOURS SERVICE

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

7.4 THE FOSTER CARERS ASSOCIATION

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

7.5 BAAF AND THE FOSTERING NETWORK

- 7.5.1 Central Bedfordshire Council is a full member of the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) which is a leading national voluntary organisation working to promote best practice for children separated from their birth families. It is the leading organisation representing local authority and independent fostering agencies and provides training courses, practice guidance, research material, and a consultation and advice service to all its members.
- 7.5.2 The Fostering Service is a corporate member of The Fostering Network that works to promote fostering in the UK. All approved foster carers are also provided with individual membership, funded by the Fostering Service. During this year the Fostering Service also provided foster carers with an independent Advise and Mediation Service which carers could access via The Fostering Network.

7.6 NOTIFICATIONS

- 7.6.1 The Fostering Service has to notify Ofsted (Schedule 7) of any significant events, accidents or incidents that occur for children whilst placed in foster care.
- 7.6.2 Between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2015 there were 19 notifications sent to Ofsted. Notification categories were as follows:-
- A child placed with foster parents is missing from placement - 14
(11 for less than 24 hours; 2 between 1-6 days; 1 between 1-28 days)
 - Children requiring hospitalisation - 3
 - Incident necessitating call the police - 1
 - Child protection enquiry involving a child placed with foster carers - 1

It is important to note that although 14 children were recorded as missing, some of these should actually have been recorded as unauthorised absences.

7.7 ALLEGATIONS

- 7.7.1 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 Advice and Mediation Service.
- 7.7.2 Between 1st April 2014 and the 31st March 2015 there were 4 allegations of misconduct made against foster carers.
- 1 Section 47 enquiry was made in May 2014 regarding CBC Family and Friends Foster Carers living in Wales in relation to caring for 2 children aged 7 and 6. The concerns were in relation to emotional and physical abuse. The children were removed, a Section 47 Investigation was instigated, the outcome of which was that the allegations were substantiated and the foster carers' approval was terminated.
 - The 3 other allegations made were all referred for the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) but did not reach the threshold for investigation.

7.8 COMPLAINTS

- 7.8.1 The Fostering Service uses the Children's Services Complaints Procedure for dealing with and monitoring complaints by foster carers, birth parents and relatives, staff and other partners with a relevant interest in the way CBC fostering services are provided.
- 7.8.2 Between April 1st 2014 and the 31st March 2015 there were 6 complaints made about the Fostering Service, 2 from a birth parent/family member, 3 from existing foster carers and 1 from a prospective foster carer.
- 7.8.3 Out of these complaints the overall outcomes were that 2 complaints were upheld and 4 were partially upheld.

7.9 COMPLIMENTS

- 7.9.1 Compliments about service delivery from customers and for their representatives are recorded within the service as these, along with complaints and comments, can be shared to promote learning and improvement.
- 7.9.2 Between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2015 the Fostering Service received 15 compliments: 6 were from foster carers praising the support they received from individuals within the fostering team; 1 was from a foster carer who had attended a Talktime meeting with senior managers who stated; "how refreshing to discuss matters so dear to foster carers

hearts and to feel heard". Assessing social workers also received compliments, with 1 Family and Friends Carer stating "thank you for your help, guidance and understanding through what had been a difficult and often tearful assessment". Another Special Guardianship Order carer stated "thanks for everything you have done for us and E (the child), words cannot describe how we feel". Fostering panel also provided positive feedback on assessing social workers assessments. Other compliments included IRO's (Independent Reviewing Officers), or childcare social workers regarding the excellent care provided by our in house foster carers.

7.10 OFSTED

- 7.10.1 Ofsted last inspected the Fostering Service in December 2012 when the service was judged to be good overall.
- 7.10.2 Ofsted have now changed their format for inspections so the Fostering Service will no longer have a stand alone inspection. Ofsted will now inspect the Fostering Service as part of the Children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers Inspection process. Inspections now take place at any time and one is likely to take place in the near future.

SECTION 8 – CONCLUSION

- 8.0.1 This has been a successful year for the Fostering Service. There have been many changes that have taken place i.e. the Fostering Service moving offices and becoming part of the Corporate Parenting Service. New initiatives have been introduced such as the foster carers fees scheme and the service has totally re-branded. The main focus for the Service this year has been to increase the number of in-house foster carers as at the 31st March 2014 there were more children placed in I.F.A. placements (54%) than there were in house (46%). These figures have now reversed with 54% of children in house and 46% in I.F.A.'s (54%). The Service has met its recruitment target to recruit a net gain of 10 foster carers for the year which has also enabled significant savings to be made in terms of placement costs as we now have less reliance on I.F.A. placements. With the growing number of foster carers already recruited in 2014/15 and with the new recruitment target set for 2015/16 the Service will need to recruit additional supervising social workers to ensure that new and existing foster carers receive the high standard of support/supervision they currently receive in order for them to undertake their fostering role appropriately.
- 8.0.2 This year has seen a number of foster carers and children of foster carers receive local and national recognition for the work they do in relation to fostering. A number of male carers received local recognition for their roles as male carers/role models as part of Central Bedfordshire's 'Great Dads' initiative. Fostering Network (one of the leading national voluntary organisation focusing on fostering) also gave recognition to 1 foster carer in relation to her outstanding contribution to fostering and to 3 sons and daughters of foster carers in recognition of their contribution to fostering and support to their parents as foster carers.
- 8.0.3 Whilst Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough have now disaggregated the two Local Authorities continue to work in partnership as there are still children placed across in each others locality/authority and the services continue to work together in relation to these children as well as on other initiatives such as training and recruitment.

- 8.0.4 Regulation 24., family and friends and S.G.O. placements have continued to present challenges to the service mainly in terms of the increased number coming through, the tight court timescales needed to assess, the complexity often involved in this area of work but also in terms of the number of different types of assessments often needed for one family i.e. Viability, Reg. 24, Full Family and Friends and S.G.O. Whilst this has created a lot of work for the Service a large number of children have been able to move out of the care system when S.G.O.'s have been granted. With the number of S.G.O. carers growing significantly over recent years a review of the structure of the teams will be undertaken in the next financial year to decide whether developing a specific Family/Friends and S.G.O. team may better meet the needs of these specific carers.
- 8.0.5 The Service has provided a responsive and supportive service to foster carers as a result there have been very few allegations and complaints and a good number of compliments. In the forthcoming year the Service will continue to utilise the support and feedback from foster carers in order to develop the service so that it is not only sensitive and responsive to their needs but also continues to be child focused.
- 8.0.6 The service has to be able to respond to the identified needs of children needing placements in the Central Bedfordshire area. For the forthcoming year the Service needs to concentrate on increasing the number of in-house foster carers so that more of our children can be placed with carers who can appropriately meet their needs more locally. For 2015/16 the Service, therefore, aims to recruit 15 new fostering households (net gain) which includes Family and Friends carers for children who otherwise would be placed outside their family network.

This Report has been composed and presented for members to consider and note by:

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

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Produced by Central Bedfordshire Council

Fostering Team
Unit 16, Stephenson Court
Fraser Road
Priory Business Park
Bedford
MK44 3WJ

www.bedford.gov.uk

www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Tel: 0300 300 8090

Fax: 0300 300 8255

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APPENDIX B – REPORT FROM FOSTERING PANEL CHAIR

9.2 Fostering Panel Overview Report – Panel Chair April 2014 to March 2015.

9.1 Introduction

This Report by CBC's Fostering and Permanence Panel Chair covers the year from April 2014 to March 2015. This is the first full year that the Panel has run just with CBC work and not jointly with Bedford Borough. It has been a busy year and we have run 17 Panels and the number and complexity of the cases has at times been quite challenging. With a number of significant staff changes within the fostering service it has also been a time of readjustment, with staff needing to get to know the Panel and vice versa.

9.2 Panel Membership

I (Kathy Bird) have Chaired the Fostering Panel for Central Beds and Bedford Borough since October 2005. My background is as a qualified child care social worker and manager since 1976 and I have worked mainly in the areas of Fostering, Adoption, Child Protection, Children with Disabilities and Residential Care. I have worked as an Independent Consultant for 17 years and I have worked with a wide range of local authorities and voluntary organisations. I am completely independent of Central Bedfordshire Social Care – a requirement of the Fostering Regulations 2011.

From April 2014 to March 2015 there has been a Central List of Panel members that the Panel could call upon to be quorate. Panel membership was drawn from the following members:

Social Worker – Senior Practitioner (Adoption) CBC – Vice Chair

Social Worker – Reviewing Officer / Team Manager (Fostering) Independent – Vice Chair,

Social Worker / Guardian – Independent,

Educational Psychologist / Foster Carer – Independent,

Social Worker – Family Group Meetings – Independent,

Elected Member – CBC,

Foster Care – IFA,

Foster Carer – IFA,

Adoptive Parent and Magistrate – Independent,

Gypsy and Traveller Educational Consultant,

Independent Family Group Meeting Co-Ordinator,

Social Worker (Fostering) – Independent.

All Panel members have continued to show a very high commitment to attending panels and it is obvious from their contributions that they put a great deal of time, thought and dedication into their roles on Panel. The amount of reading per Panel has increased significantly this year. There have not been any problems in getting Panels together that are quorate (minimum of 5 members with Independent Chair and at least one social worker), even when calling additional and extended Panels. However, it has been a challenging year for the Chair and Panel Admin when most months have had two Panels.

Panel members receive their papers 7 working days in advance of Panel. Reading the papers supplied in preparation for discussion is a considerable undertaking as the papers may involve up to six or seven hours of close reading. All members devote a great deal of time and personal commitment to the work of the panel and invariably come well prepared. Many thanks to all Panel members for their hard work and dedication

Under previous legislation it was advised that Panels had 10 members. Since the introduction of the Central List we have been able to have more Panel Members ready and willing to attend, but we have cut the number of Panel Members per Panel down to usually 7 per Panel. This means that we can still meet the quoracy requirement of a minimum of 5 Panel members but still be able to be quorate if anyone is ill on the day or realises at the last minute that they have a conflict of interest (e.g. someone turns up who is known to them in a personal capacity). Cutting the number of Panel Members to 7 means that the Panel is (slightly) less daunting for applicants and workers who are presenting cases.

Ongoing Area for improvement:

Getting the balance of Panel members right on any Panel remains a constant process of review as Panel Membership changes. CBC still need to recruit some new Panel members who are not involved with other Panels as this will help with availability on extra dates. It would also be useful if any new members had not done direct work in CBC before as this would help with the cases where Panel members are not allowed to sit due to conflicts of interest.

Diversity.

CBC Fostering and Permanence Panel retains members with a wide range of background, ethnicity and culture. Panel members are white British, black British, South African, Nigerian and American. Age ranges go from 33 years to 67 years of age. There are people who are currently fostering and people who have adopted. Some Panel members have very young families of their own, one Panel member was looked after outside their family as a young child, and over half of the Panel members have experience of adoption and fostering in their immediate family. One Panel member is a wheelchair user and many Panel members have experience of disability in their immediate family.

Areas for improvement:

It has always been a difficult issue to recruit enough males to get a balance at Panel and also to get people who are at the younger end of the age spectrum. There have been fewer occasions this year where Panels have had to go ahead with no males present due to the great commitment of our two male Panel members. However, one of those men leaves the Panel in March 2015 and we are about to interview 2 more males for Panel membership. Getting a better balance of age and gender on Panel should remain a high priority for the Panel Adviser to assist the Chair with in the year 2015 / 16.

9.3 Panel Support.

Panel work is supported throughout the whole process by the Panel Adviser. Within CBC presently, the role of Adviser to the Fostering Panel is still not filled permanently and we have so far had three Agency workers in this role this year. All three Agency workers have done their best to try to make things work and the current Panel Adviser is working extremely hard to get things right. However, having 3 Panel Advisers who were new to the role, not knowing the Area or the staff and trying to do this at a time of such change has meant that consistency and follow through of some aspects of Panel work has not been as thorough as we would have liked across the

year. The current Panel Adviser is trying to catch up on some of the issues which had got lost such as follow up from each Panel on Practice Issues.

Throughout the whole year Panel has been supported by two excellent Panel Administrators. This year they have recently been joined by a third member of staff to assist them. I have to reiterate what I said last year, that I cannot speak highly enough of their effort, efficiency, organisational skills and good humour throughout difficult times. CBC is indeed fortunate to have such dedicated workers and as Panel Chair I value their contribution very highly. Since the role of Panel Adviser for Fostering and Adoption has been split into two part time roles staff often go to Admin for issues they would previously have asked the Panel Adviser to do. The pressure of running two adoption and two fostering Panels each month is significant and CBC should ensure that the Administrators receive the best possible level of back up and support – they are often the glue which keeps the whole Panel system running smoothly.

A Medical Adviser to the Panel gives advice in writing in advance of Panel Meetings and on occasions over this year the Medical Adviser has been asked to provide further detail on specific cases or conditions to better inform Panel's decision making. With the increase in Family and Friends Carers the timescales for medical advice are tight and on occasions medical advice has not been available until the very last minute or even on the day of Panel. With no-one on Panel with specific medical experience this could lead to cases being withdrawn at the last minute or deferred for further analysis.

CBC's Legal team give advice in writing to the Panel Meetings which used to be given to the Panel Chair at Panel but is now usually sent to the Chair the day before the Panel and read out at the meeting for other Panel members. During the course of this year there could have been closer liaison between the Panel and Legal services but the turnover in the Panel Adviser role has not made this a priority and this is a gap which the Department and Legal services are now working hard to address. The Panel Chair and colleagues in Legal Services are all committed to making the best possible advice available so that Panel can do its job well. The current Panel Adviser is building up positive relationships with the Legal Team and we are about to start a process of Legal Advisers observing Panel

Areas for improvement:

It is my view as Panel Chair that it remains imperative that the role of Panel Adviser is permanently recruited to as soon as possible. It is this role which provides the mechanisms that ensure that the work of the Panel is carried through into Management, the teams and into everyday work.

In 2015/16 there will need to be close liaison with Medical and Legal Advisers to ensure that Panel is given clear, timely and appropriate advice within a time frame which allows Panel to reflect upon the advice offered.

9.4 Panel Roles / Tasks.

The Panel task includes addressing work presented as follows (with the number of cases considered this year in brackets):

- Applications for approval of foster carers for a range of tasks (20)
- Applications relating to Family and Friends (Connected Persons) carers for children already or about to be placed with them (12)
- Taking a view in Connected Persons cases where an additional 8 week extension to temporary approval is proposed in order for assessments to be completed (11)

- First Annual Reviews of foster carers and other Reviews which discuss continuation of approval, extension of approval or Standards of Care (22)
- Matching of children to long term foster carers (11)
- De-Registration of carers (1)
- Quality Assurance of work presented (every Panel)

Panel makes a recommendation on whether to approve prospective carers or re-approve approved carers to the Agency Decision Maker who then either ratifies or rejects the recommendation. Applicants have the right of review through the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) or a return to Panel for the case to be re-heard. Over the last year there have been a total of 76 cases heard at Panel and out of these there have only been 4 occasions where the Agency Decision maker did not agree with the Panel recommendation – one where the Panel did not support the Extension of Temporary approval of a Family and Friends Carer and the ADM made a decision to support the Extension, and three case where Panel recommended approval or continued approval of Carers but the ADM felt this was not the right way forward. In 2 of these last 3 cases the ADM sought additional information, not originally available to Panel. All of these cases had been very complicated cases and the Panel and ADM both respected and understood the reasons for reaching different conclusions. No cases from Fostering have gone to the Independent Review Mechanism this year which is a positive outcome.

9.5 Appraisals

The appraisal of all Panel members takes place annually. All involved value this opportunity to consider Panel functioning, outside the day to day work of panel. The Appraisals, conducted by the Panel Chair and the Panel Adviser, reflect on the Panel member's contribution for the year, any comments they have on improving processes and any training they wish to undertake over the next year. With Panel agendas being more busy this year it has become harder to try to fit these appraisals (which are a legal requirement) around the normal Panel Day. We have had to set up some extra Panel Appraisal time, which of course has additional cost implications.

9.6 Panel Training

There has been one full days training offered to all Panel members in the last year. In September 2014 a Training Day was held for Fostering and Permanence Panel Members together with members of the Fostering Team. This day focussed on the following areas:

- The process of rehabilitation to Birth Parents,
- Family and Friends assessments,
- Updates on the Fostering Service,
- Feedback from the young adult child of a foster carer about what it is really like to live in a fostering household,
- A social workers experience of what it is like to present to the Panel.

It was a very positive day for all concerned and Panel members and staff seemed to get a lot out of the day. Panel members rarely have time on Panel days to talk to one another or to staff and these annual training days (legally required) are much appreciated by everyone.

The length and complexity of Panel Agendas this year have not left time for “Bite size” training sessions but we are ever optimistic that we will be able to fit some of these in soon and have a number of sessions waiting for an appropriate slot e.g. the role of the fostering Reviewing Officer, Out of Hours Duty Service, what it is really like to be a Family Carer.

Panel members now also have access to the on line training programmes which are accessible for staff and Carers.

9.7 Transparency and openness
Carers attending Panel

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

Observers

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

Panel Feedback

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

Issues which have been raised this year which have highlighted areas to consider change are:

- *Two Carers were unsure where to go when arriving at Panel (this is being further addressed via their invite letter and reinforcement of what to do via their social workers).*
- *Two Carers raised concerns about parking – this is an ongoing issue for all attendees to Panel when meeting at Priory House.*
- *One Couple stated “it would be nice for Panel to comment not just on the Carers positives and strengths but also on their children’s”. Panel try to do this as a matter of course but this Carer highlighted how important that can be for fostering families.*
- *Two Carers commented on being kept waiting due to the Panel running late. It is now common practice for the Chair to ask the Panel Adviser to speak with the next applicants waiting if there is any significant delay to the schedule.*
- *One Carer felt they were being questioned more than once about the same issue and that this “made us feel that our integrity was being challenged”. An apology was offered to this couple via their social worker and informed that this had not been Panel’s intention. Panel were reminded that if “their” question had already been answered then they should not repeat issues.*
- *One Carer felt that some Panel members did not make eye contact with her during discussions where the family wanted to extend their approval criteria and Panel felt this was not appropriate due to issues raised by one of their birth children. Dealing with difficult issues where there is disagreement is always hard and Panel members were given time to reflect on this issue and think about whether they may have behaved in this way, and how to manage such issue in the future.*

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

- *“Panel were friendly and professional and put us at our ease”.*
- *“We felt very proud and appreciated. Panel was professional and had obviously read our notes and understood us very well”.*
- *“We would like to thank everyone involved. We found the experience straightforward and friendly”.*
- *“I was given lots of time to answer any questions. A very good outcome. It’s good that some of the Panel members are the same so this makes you feel at ease”.*
- *“The Panel were the best we have attended, very fair and interested in what we had to say – but made us feel relaxed as well”.*
- *“Very good experience for both foster parents and foster son” (A long term matching where the young person attended part of panel)*
- *“We left feeling very pleased and positive. We were impressed with the care which was given”*
- *“Very friendly, welcoming and appreciative”.*

9.8 Quality Assurance role.

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

i) Individual Issues

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

ii) Practice Issues

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

- Use of Photobox for Life Story Work,
- Creating Support Plans for Long Term Placements,
- Disclosure of Foster Carers address to potentially violent parent.
- Transfer of Foster Carers Protocol.

iii) Assessments and Reports

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

Overall, in the year from April 2014 to March 2015 the standard of Report writing has been good. The new format for assessing new foster carers has meant that the assessments have contained more appropriate analysis and less “story telling”.

The very tight deadlines for assessments of Family and Friends Carers means that some of the Reports presented on these cases have obviously been done quickly and these Reports need to be better collated and have more analysis of the final picture. However, one or two workers who have specialised in these cases have presented Panel with some excellent work.

iv) Input from Child Care Teams.

As this Panel now takes all the fostering cases for CBC, Panel has had more input from the child care workers. Attendance of child care workers at Panel for long term

linkings and Family and Friends cases makes a huge difference to Panel being able to understand what is really going on in the household. One or two child care workers who have attended Panel have shown an exceptional knowledge and understanding of their work, and have been thanked for their input. When child care workers do not attend for these cases there is definitely not as clear a picture for Panel to consider and it is harder to ensure the "Child's voice" remains central.

v) Panel Chairs Meetings

Under the previous arrangement of joint working on fostering for CBC and BBC there used to be joint Panel Chairs meetings held approximately quarterly with ADMs and Head of Service. As Adoption has remained a shared service these meetings continued until February 2015 when it was concluded that separate Panel Chairs meetings for Fostering needed to be just CBC based. This meeting also set up arrangements for the Head of Service and the Practice Manager (Fostering) to attend Panel regularly to assist with good communication.

vi) Eastern Region Panel Chairs Meetings.

As Panel Chair I have attended all of the quarterly Meetings of the Eastern Regional Fostering Panel Chairs, along with one of the Vice Chairs and another Panel member who is Vice Chair on an Independent Fostering Panel. These meetings take place in Cambridge and Ipswich and are a time for Panel Chairs to meet together to consider the wider national picture for fostering and to improve practice. All meetings are attended by and supported by BAAF and Fostering Network. During 2014/ 15 topics covered have included:

- An analysis of the Bridgend Serious Case Review with particular reference to Panels,
- Staying Put update (Fostering Network)
- Delegated Authority to Foster Carers.
- Transfer of Foster Carers protocol.
- Smoking and Electronic cigarettes.
- Fostering Deaf children

These meetings have been extremely useful and a number of matters from these meetings have been fed back into CBC.

9.9 OBJECTIVES FOR 2015/2016

- Continue to establish the CBC Fostering and Permanence Panel into a strong working team and fully integrate new members.
- Continue to lobby for the Panel Adviser's role to be recruited to on a permanent basis in order to provide continuity and consistency throughout the whole Panel process.
- Work with the Panel Adviser and Teams to ensure that an absolute minimum of new information is presented to Panel at the last minute.
- In 2015/16 there will need to be close liaison with Medical and Legal Advisers to ensure that Panel is given clear, timely and appropriate advice within a time frame which allows Panel to reflect upon the advice offered.
- Continue to review and extend the diversity of panel membership.
- Work on the liaison between the Panel and the Fostering and Child Care teams to assist with joint working.
- Establish a new pattern within CBC of Panel Chair meeting with Head of Service and Agency Decision Makers.

As Panel Chair, some Panel days seem very challenging but I would like to end this report by stating what a privilege it continues to be to have the chance to work with some really good staff but most importantly to have the chance to share and influence the work of some exceptional and highly talented foster carers who show true dedication to the children in their care.

Kathy J Bird
Panel Chair – CBC Fostering and Permanence
April 2015

APPENDIX C – PANEL ACTIVITY

9.2 Fostering Panel– Panel Activity April 2014 to March 2015.

- 10.1.1 Between 1st April 2014 – 31st March 2015 the Fostering & Permanence Panel met 16 times and recommended that 30 households should be approved as foster carers. 2 of these were not agreed by the Agency Decision Maker and 28 households were approved as foster carers.
- 10.1.2 Of the 28 carers newly approved by the Fostering & Permanence Panel, 6 were approved as Family & Friends foster carers and 12 as career carers.
- 10.1.3 Between 1st April 2014 – 31st March 2015 the Fostering and Permanence Panel heard 2 Brief Reports, both of which were Family & Friends applications, 1 of which was withdrawn by the carers and 1 could not be supported due to disclosures on a DBS.
- 10.1.4 During the year 1st April 2014 – 31st March 2015 28 households were approved as foster carers (which compares with 30 the previous year).
- 10.1.5 During the year 1st April 2014 – 31st March 2015 the Fostering and Permanence Panel heard 13 Extensions of Temporary Approval, 3 of which were out of timescales and could not proceed to a recommendation. The remaining 10 were recommended for an Extension of Temporary Approval.
- 10.1.6 Between 1st April 2014 – 31st March 2015 11 children were recommended for a match with foster carers at the Fostering and Permanence Panel. Of these there were 3 sibling groups of 3, 2 and 2 respectively.
- 10.1.7 Between 1st April 2014 – 31st March 2015 the Fostering and Permanence Panel considered annual reviews for 23 households, 15 of which required changes of approval, 1 was following a complaint, 1 following concerns and 1 following an allegation. Panel made positive recommendations for all of these cases; however, the review following the allegation was not agreed by the Agency Decision Maker.
- 10.1.8 In total 1st April 2014 – 31st March 2015 73 cases were heard by Fostering and Permanence Panel, this compares with 88 in 2013/2014.

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Central Bedfordshire Council

Corporate Parenting Panel

6 July 2015

ADOPTION AGENCY ANNUAL REPORT

Report of Cllr Carole Hegley, Executive Member for Social Care and Housing
(carole.hegley@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

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

Purpose of this report

The report and appendices outlines the statutory framework regarding the Adoption annual report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to:

1. Note the statutory report

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

The report is not scheduled to go to Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Background

1. Appendix A: Adoption Agency Annual Report 2014-15
2. Appendix B: Adoption Panel Chairs Report 2014-15

Council Priorities

3. Central Bedfordshire Councils Strategic Plan 2012-16 Priority 3 – Promote health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable.
4. The Children and Young People's Plan 2011-14 Priority 2 – Protecting children and keeping them safe.
5. Adoption is a key statutory service to Looked After Children.

Corporate Implications

Risk Management

6. Regulatory Risks: Failure to report would be a breach of National Minimum Standard.
7. Child Protection Risks: failure to assess risk may lead to unfavourable outcomes.

Legal Implications

8. Regulations, associated Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards outline the requirement to report to Members on the management and outcomes of the services, in order that they can satisfy themselves that the services are effective and achieving good outcomes for children.

Financial Implications

9. The use of Inter-agency adoption placements has been highlighted in the Adoption Agency annual report for 2014-15 and it is difficult to forecast the use of Inter-agency adoption placements for this financial year 2015-16. The Corporate Parenting Panel's attention is drawn to this as it is a financial pressure.

Equalities Implications

10. Adoption affects all sectors of communities.

Conclusion and next Steps

11. The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to note the Adoption Agency statutory report for 2014-15.

Appendices

The following Appendices are attached:

12. Appendix A - Adoption Agency Annual Report 2014-15
13. Appendix B - Adoption Panel Chairs Report 2014-15

Background Papers

None



Appendix A

Adoption Agency

Annual Report

**For the period
2014 - 2015**

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SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.0.1 This report describes the activity of Central Bedfordshire Council's Adoption Agency during the period 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2015, noting their achievements, clarifying the remit and focus of their work and identifying recommendations for the development of the service.
- 1.0.2 This report is provided as part of the monitoring of the adoption agency required under the Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 and National Minimum Standards 2011. This report will be presented to the Central Bedfordshire Council Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and a six-monthly update report will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

1.1 STAFFING / SERVICE STRUCTURE

- 1.1.1 The Adoption Team of Central Bedfordshire Council is made up of the following staff:
- 1x full time Practice Manager
 - 3x Senior Practitioners (2 full-time equivalent)
 - 4x Social Workers (3.5 full time equivalent)
 - 1x Social Work Assistant
 - 1x Letter Box Co-ordinator
 - 1x Administrator
- 1.1.2 The service has remained largely fully staffed this year.
- 1.1.3 Most staff have a number of years post-qualifying experience, and a programme of additional support is in place for those newly-qualified or in the early years of their social work career. The team carries out the full functions of an adoption agency, with social workers completing a range of adoption work, including adopters' assessments, family finding and work with adopted adults and their birth relatives.
- 1.1.4 The adoption agency is supported by specialist staff who work across the Adoption and Fostering service area. These staff include a Business Support Officer with responsibility for adoption and special guardianship allowance payments, Recruitment and Marketing Officer, a Training Officer and the Panel Advisor and Secretaries who support the adoption panel. The adoption panel staff are shared with Bedford Borough Council.

1.2 THE ADOPTION PANEL

- 1.2.1 The Adoption Panel is provided by Central Bedfordshire Council but is a shared panel with Bedford Borough Council.
- 1.2.2 The Adoption Panel usually meets every month of the year, with extraordinary panels as and when required. During the period 1st April 2014 – 31st March 2015 the panel met on 22 occasions.
- 1.2.3 The Adoption Panel considers applications from prospective adopters and makes

recommendations as to their approval. Panel also considers the proposed match between children with adopters, making recommendations on any matters brought before them.

1.3 ADOPTION PANEL MEMBERSHIP

- 1.3.1 As at 31st March 2015 the Adoption Panel central list was comprised of 16 members. Each panel is made up of 6 members which include the Panel Chair, one or two social work representatives and independent members.
- 1.3.2 In attendance but non voting members are the Professional Adviser and Panel Secretary.
- 1.3.3 The Legal Adviser to the Panel gives advice in writing in advance of Panel meetings.

1.4 PANEL AND AGENCY DECISION MAKER ACTIVITY

- 1.4.1 In 2014/2015 the Adoption Panel met 22 times and considered 3 plans for relinquished babies.
- 1.4.2 Between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2015 the Agency Decision Maker decided that adoption should be the plan for 26 children. This compares to 48 in 2013/2014 and is a decrease compared to the previous four years.
- 1.4.3 In relation to approvals, the Panel recommended that 35 households were suitable to adopt a child. Of these 22 families were from Central Bedfordshire and 13 from Bedford Borough. This compares to a total of 29 households in 2013/2014. All applicants attended the panel.
- 1.4.4 In terms of matching, the panel recommended that 50 children should be placed with particular adopters. Of these 29 were from Central Bedfordshire and 21 from Bedford Borough. This compares to 20 children in 2013/2014 from Central Bedfordshire Council.

1.5 PANEL TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

- 1.5.1 The Adoption Agency strives to ensure that there is a good level of training, appraisal and induction offered to Panel Members. In October 2014 an Adoption Panel training day was held which covered the following topics:
- Adoption reforms
 - Family finding
 - Teenage Adoption Panel
 - Highs and lows of placements – an overview
- 1.5.2 All Panel Members had an annual appraisal where their personal training needs were discussed and considered.

1.6 PROVISION OF INFORMATION ON ADOPTION

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

SECTION 2 – CHILDREN AND ADOPTION

2.0 – CHILDREN REFERRED FOR ADOPTION

- 2.0.1 In 2014/2015, there were 26 children from Central Bedfordshire referred to the service for adoption.

2.1 - OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN WITH PLANS FOR ADOPTION

- 2.1.0 Of the 26 children with plans for adoption in 2014/2015, the team are still family finding for 7 children, 18 children had been placed with prospective adopters by 31st March 2015, with a further 1 having been matched but not yet placed.
- 2.1.1 In order to avoid case drift for children, social workers are asked to refer children for family finding when adoption is a possible outcome for that child. In view of this a total of 53 children have been referred during 2014/2015. This does not mean that all children referred will subsequently be adopted, but ensures that robust planning is considered as part of a child's care plan. In many cases, children safely return to their families or are placed with extended family members under other Orders, such as Special Guardianship.

2.2 – PLACEMENTS OF CHILDREN

- 2.2.1 Members of the Adoption Team were active in facilitating the placements of the 29 children from Central Bedfordshire placed for adoption in 2014/2015. The number of placements represents an increase from the previous year when 13 placements were made.
- 2.2.2 There were 6 sibling groups placed for adoption during 2014/2015.

2.3 – TYPE OF ADOPTION PLACEMENT

- 2.3.1 Of the 29 children matched for adoption by Central Bedfordshire in 2014/2015, 15 were placed with adopters assessed and approved by Central Bedfordshire, 2 were placed with adopters recruited by Bedford Borough and the remaining 12 children were matched with adopters approved by other agencies. 28 of these children are now placed with their new families and one child is in the process of introductions.
- 2.3.2 No children were placed under the new 'Fostering to Adopt' regulations. The adoption team has guidelines in place to consider this as an option for children, however it is

recognised that this will only be an option for a small number of children in any one year.

2.4 – ETHNICITY OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION

2.4.1 Of the 28 children placed for adoption by Central Bedfordshire in the year 2014/2015, 18 were White British, 1 was of White/Asian ethnicity, 1 was Asian/Thai, 3 were White/Guyanese and 5 were of dual heritage.

2.5 – AGES OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION

2.5.1 Of the 28 children placed for adoption by Central Bedfordshire in 2014/2015, 15 were aged 2 years or under, 8 were between 3-5 years and 5 were 5 and above.

2.6 – GENDER OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION

2.6.1 Of the 28 children placed for adoption by Central Bedfordshire, 11 were female and 17 were male.

2.7 – ADOPTION ORDERS

2.2.1 Adoption Orders were made in respect of 3 of the 28 children placed during the period 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2015. It is expected that a further 20 orders will be made during the forthcoming year.

SECTION 3 – ADOPTERS

3.0 – THE WORK OF THE ADOPTION TEAM

3.0.1 Every child looked after who may need a new permanent family has a social worker from the Adoption Team allocated to take lead responsibility for finding a suitable family. The Family Finding Social Worker attends regular permanence planning meetings with other professionals involved with the child. For those children for whom a return to the care of his / her parents or a member of the extended family is not possible, adoption or long term fostering will be the plan. The Family Finding Social Worker is active in identifying adoptive families as appropriate to the needs of the child. This helps ensure that permanence is achieved for all children in a timely manner.

3.1 – RECRUITMENT OF ADOPTERS

3.1.1 In order to ensure a range of adopters are recruited for both children from Central Bedfordshire, and to meet the needs of children nationally requiring adoptive families, a range of recruitment activity has taken place during the year. This has included holding Drop-in sessions as well as monthly information evenings. Advertising in local newspapers and magazines was used to publicise events.

3.2 – THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS: ENQUIRIES, ASSESSMENTS AND APPROVALS

3.2.1 All assessments are carried out in accordance with the 2011 National Minimum

Standards for Adoption and the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and the Statutory Guidance for Adoption published in July 2013.

- 3.2.2 88 enquiries from prospective adopters were received in 2014/2015. At 31st March Central Bedfordshire had 15 sets of adopters in Stage one of the process and 11 couples and one single adopter in Stage 2. In total 22 households were approved during the period.

3.3 – ETHNICITY OF ADOPTERS

- 3.3.1 Of the adopters approved 19 households were White British, 1 couple were Venezuelan, and one adoptive carer was Caribbean/Indian.

3.4 – POST APPROVAL SUPPORT

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

3.5 – TRAINING FOR ADOPTERS

- 3.5.1 Social Workers from the Adoption team provide the preparation training for adopters. Adopters also have access to the full training programme offered to the Agency's foster carers and adopters. This ongoing training is available to both approved adopters as well as to adoptive parents at any point after an Adoption Order has been granted.
- 3.5.2 During the period April 2014 to March 2015 a modular preparation training programme has been held. This runs monthly with adopters attending at least three foundation modules during the period of their assessment prior to presentation at adoption panel.
- 3.5.3 The training modules are:
- The Child
 - Adoption For Life
 - The Adoption Process
- 3.5.4 Training is evaluated at the end of each programme, and again when prospective adopters attend Adoption Panel. The feedback to Panel during the past 12 months has been universally positive.

SECTION 4 – ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES

4.0 – POST ADOPTION SUPPORT TO FAMILIES

- 4.0.1 The Adoption and Children Act 2002 established the right of adopted families to request an assessment of their adoption support needs.
- 4.0.2 These families either self-refer or come to the attention of the department via another agency. In such instances the team either provides direct social work support or where a specific need is identified, a specialist service may be commissioned.
- 4.0.3 As of 31st March 2015, the team was working directly with 16 adopted children and their families who were in need of support. This includes one family where a social worker from the team trained in Theraplay delivered this intervention to assist the development of the child's relationship with her adoptive parents. This figure represents an increase from 2014/2015 when the team were working with a total of 12 families.
- 4.0.4 A number of adopted children and their families were assessed as being in need of therapeutic support. It is expected that this is provided by community Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). In a small number of cases this year CAMHS did not have the resources to meet the identified needs of children or deemed that children did not meet their referral criteria. In view of this we have commissioned services from a psychologist and counsellor for certain children.
- 4.0.5 The team have a mailing list of adoptive families who are sent newsletters, invitations to support groups for adoptive parents and family days, some of which are provided by the service and some by Adoption UK. Since the disaggregation with Bedford Borough we have continued to provide some of these events as a shared service to families living in Bedfordshire. Feedback from adopters and children about these events is extremely positive and it is clear that they all value the opportunity to meet together and to maintain contact with members of the Adoption Team.
- 4.0.6 The Adoption Team also provide groups for adopted children and their families, including Talking about Adoption workshops. All adoption support referrals have an assessment of need and adoption support plan upon request.
- 4.0.7 Each child placed for adoption is required to have a contact plan in relation to their birth family. The service currently manages contact plans on behalf of over 100 children many of which have required direct intervention to support all the parties involved in the contact arrangements, i.e. adopted children and young people, their adoptive parents and their birth families.

4.1 – SERVICES TO ADOPTED ADULTS AND BIRTH RELATIVES

- 4.1.1 Social Workers in the Adoption Team provide an advice and counselling service to adopted people seeking information and access to their birth records. For all residents of Central Bedfordshire, a counselling service is offered and information is provided to other councils who are supporting people in their areas who were adopted through Central Bedfordshire. Specific leaflets outlining this service are available to enquirers through the Adoption Duty Desk.
- 4.1.2 Not only is an initial counselling interview offered to those seeking birth records, but work is undertaken to locate records held by other Adoption Agencies. Counselling and practical advice during tracing, an intermediary service and pre and post reunion support are also available to adopted adults and their birth relatives.

- 4.1.3 Birth relatives seeking to make contact with adopted adults are offered information and advice and an intermediary service. In the case of birth relatives, they are not given any identifying information about the adopted person.
- 4.1.4 At 31st March 2014 the Adoption Team were providing support to 18 adult adoptees and birth relatives who were seeking access to records and support in tracing.

4.2 – DISRUPTED ADOPTIONS

- 4.2.1 During the period 31st March 2014 to 1st April 2015 the placements of five children placed for adoption have disrupted. These were:
- Siblings aged 5 and 3 at the point of disruption. They were placed together in an inter-agency placement.
 - Siblings aged 5 and 4 who were placed together with Bedford Borough adopters.
 - One single child aged 6 who was placed with Central Bedfordshire adopters.

All of these placements ended less than a year after the children were placed and before the adoption order had been made. Disruption meetings have been held in respect of the single child and one of the sibling groups and we are currently arranging a disruption meeting for the other children. We are also examining the factors which might have led to the disruptions with a view to improving practice. This will be an ongoing process but key points that have so far emerged relate to the nature of the support provided to adopters during introductions, the need for closer monitoring of the introductory process and the need for rigorous evidencing and checking out of information during the assessment process. We shall be working with staff to ensure that these elements are addressed.

SECTION 5 – OTHER ACTIVITIES

5.0 – INTER-COUNTRY ADOPTION

- 5.0.1 Inter-Country adoption has become increasingly more complex in terms of the legal requirements of those countries that permit children to be placed for adoption outside of their country of origin. In recognition of this and given the specialist knowledge and expertise which this work demands, the Adoption Agency has a Service Level Agreement with a voluntary adoption agency based in Reading, Parents and Children Together (PACT), which is recognised as being a leading agency in this area of work, to provide this service on its behalf.
- 5.0.2 Families who are normally resident in Central Bedfordshire wishing to adopt children from overseas are referred to PACT who will provide information and preparation training and will assess and approve families wishing to adopt children from overseas.
- 5.0.3 Families are required to pay for their assessment in accordance with Regulations but Central Bedfordshire funds all of the initial counselling interviews.

5.0.4 During 2014/2015 PACT received 5 enquiries concerning inter-country adoption from residents of Central Bedfordshire and have been working with one family who have adopted a child in the Philippines.

5.1 – THE ADOPTION CONSORTIUM

5.1.1 Central Bedfordshire Council Adoption Agency, (until December 2013 alongside Bedford Borough) is a member of the local adoption consortium whose aim is to work in partnership to share information about children and approved adopters to make local matches and to share good practice. The other full members are:

- Buckinghamshire County Council
 - Hertfordshire County Council
 - Luton Borough Council
 - Milton Keynes Council
- Associate member: St Francis Children's Society

5.2 – BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR ADOPTION AND FOSTERING (BAAF)

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

5.3 – INDEPENDENT BIRTH FAMILY COUNSELLING

5.3.1 The agency provides an Independent Birth Family Counselling and support service. This service is provided by Adoption Plus Limited on behalf of Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council Adoption Agency. Adoption Plus is an independent adoption support agency.

5.3.2 The aim of the service is to provide birth relatives of children who might be adopted on this service, Adoption Plus will undertake all counselling work with the birth family members and the counselling will be confidential unless concerns arise about the safety or welfare of a child.

5.3.3 The contract with Adoption Plus was renewed in 2014/2015 with ongoing contract reviews to ensure there is maximum support for those accessing the service and to ensure optimum take up by birth parents.

5.4 – THE ADOPTION SCORECARD

5.4.1 In 2012 the Department for Education published 'An Action Plan For Adoption: Tackling Delay' in which they outlined the intention to publish Adoption Scorecards for each council outlining performance in relation to numbers and timeliness of adoptions.

5.4.2 The scorecard details the average length of time between a child becoming looked after and moving in with their adoptive family and the length of time between the council having Court authority to place a child and them moving in with their adoptive family.

5.4.3 The scorecards published in December 2014 showed that performance in relation to timeliness of placements was in the upper quartile of all councils and better than the national average. It indicated that the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family for children who have been adopted was 553 days. It has to be borne in mind that this figure is adversely affected by children who are adopted by their foster carers where they may have been in placement for sometime before the foster carers decided to apply to adopt and by placements whereby it is thought that owing to the children's behavioural difficulties it would be advisable to delay applying for the order so that we can complete ongoing work with the children and their family. These are nevertheless successful outcomes for the children and in general once the council has Court authority to place a child a family is identified within three months.

SECTION 6 - CONCLUSION

- 6.0.1 There has been a continued increase in activity across all aspects of the service. The increase in looked after children in both councils over the last three years has resulted in a hugely increased number of referrals for permanence planning, both for adoption and for long-term fostering or for other legal alternative permanent options, such as Special Guardianship or Child Arrangement Orders.
- 6.0.2 In response, the service increased the number of assessments of prospective adopters, and focussed on placing the children waiting for placements in a timely manner. There are now only seven children waiting to be matched with families, of which two are part of a sibling group.
- 6.0.3 As a result of more placements with connected persons we expect to see fewer children referred for adoption in the coming year. We would nevertheless aim to recruit and approve 20 adoptive families in 2015/2016.
- 6.0.4 Post adoption support is becoming an increasing feature of the work of the Adoption Team. Over the past year we have seen a slight increase in referrals for post adoption support with members of the team currently working individually with 16 children and their families. In addition to this we provide support groups for adopted parents and activities for adopted children. These are open to all adoptive families living within Central Bedfordshire.
- 6.0.5 The Adoption Team are also involved in providing intermediary services for adopted adults who were either placed for adoption by other authorities and live within Central Bedfordshire or who now live elsewhere but were originally placed for adoption by this authority. The number of people accessing this service seems to have remained constant with social workers working with a total of approximately 18 people at any one time.
- 6.0.6 The Adoption Team relocated in March 2014 to Stephenson Court in Bedford to become part of the Corporate Parenting Service. This has resulted in the opportunity for closer joint working with colleagues in the Looked After Children, Court and Leaving Care Teams and assists us in enhancing the quality of our service.

Report written by:

Jackie Franklin
Adoption Practice Manager

Telephone: 0300 300 8090

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

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Produced by Central Bedfordshire Council
Adoption, Permanence and Support Team
Unit 16, Stephenson Court
Fraser Road
Priory Business Park
Bedford
MK44 3WJ

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

Tel: 0300 300 8090
Fax: 0300 300 8255

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Appendix B

Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council

Joint Adoption Panel

Overview Report – Panel Chair

April 2014 to March 2015.

1. Introduction

From April 2009 to December 2013 Central Bedfordshire hosted the Adoption and Fostering Services as a shared service for Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough. From January 2014 the two services separated in all aspects except the Adoption Panel, which situation is currently part of an ongoing review.

The Joint Adoption Panel at the start of this reporting period had moved from previously held monthly half day panels plus extra panels when required to scheduled fortnightly panels due to the increase in work load, with the likelihood that most of these would be full day panels.

Panel Membership

I (Fran Thompson) have Chaired the Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Joint Adoption Panel since June 2013. My background is as a lawyer with additional experience of Chairing several Multi-agency Group environments and Dorset County Council Fostering Panel for 7 years previously. I am also the current Chair for three other Local Authority Adoption and Fostering Panels. I am independent of both Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Authorities – a requirement of the Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011.

The Joint Adoption Panel holds a Central list of Panel members that each Panel could call upon to be quorate. As The Adoption Panel remained a Joint Panel for the period of this report, quoracy continued to consist of :

1. The person appointed to Chair the panel or one of the Vice-Chairs; and
2. A Social Worker with at least three years relevant post-qualifying experience; and
3. Four other members.

Following the increase to two panels a month, it was necessary to increase the Central List to ensure sufficient members to achieve quoracy on every occasion. A focus was given to increasing Social Work membership and to recruiting more male panel members, both of which were achieved.

Panel membership is drawn from the following 16 members:

Independent Chair

Independent – Previously Head of SEN Provision – Neighbouring Local Authority – Vice Chair

Panel Medical Adviser - Paediatrician

Social Worker – Team Manager, Children with Disabilities – BBC

Independent Social Worker – IRO - BBC

Social Worker – Senior Practitioner - CBC

Social Worker – BBC

2 Independent Social Workers - CAFCASS

Elected Member – Bedford Borough,

Elected Member – CBC,

2 Independent Adoptive Parents

Independent Member - CAFCASS

Independent Parent of an Adopted Child

Independent Member - Gypsy and Traveller Educational Consultant,

Independent Member – Adopted Person

Independent Member – Education

In addition to the required six, an extra two members are scheduled to attend each meeting to prevent cancellation and delay if a panel member is unable to attend on the day, or is held up on route. A core group attend the majority of panels and this allows for consistency, particularly when adoptive parents have been approved and return to be matched with their child(ren).

All new panel members are required to attend a panel as part of their induction process before becoming part of the Central List and all panel members have a copy of Effective Adoption Panels (updated 2013).

The Panel have adjusted to their new membership and all panel members work well together, complementing each other's strengths.

All Panel members have continued to show a very high commitment to attending panels and it is obvious from their contributions that they put a great deal of time, thought and dedication into their roles on Panel.

Panel members receive their papers 7 working days in advance of Panel. Reading the papers supplied in preparation for discussion is a considerable undertaking as the papers may involve up to five hours of close reading. All members devote a great deal of time and personal commitment to the work of the panel and invariably come well prepared.

The question of paperless panels remains current.

Areas for improvement:

Getting the balance of Panel members right on any Panel is a constant process of review as Panel Membership changes. Given the possible decrease in the future of panel business, there are no new appointments planned and careful consideration needs to be given when listing Panel Members for attendance to ensure sufficient sittings for each member to maintain competence without numbers of Panel members appearing overwhelming to applicants attending panel.

Diversity.

As in previous years, across Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough there is a wide range of backgrounds, ethnicity and culture. Panel members are white British, black British, Indian and Bangladeshi. There are people who have adopted, two who were adopted themselves as children and one who is the birth parent of an adopted child. Some Panel members have very young families of their own and many Panel members have experience of adoption and fostering in their immediate family.

2. Panel Support.

Panel work is supported throughout the whole process by the Panel Adviser. Within the Joint Adoption Panel presently, the role of Adviser to the Adoption Panel is still not filled permanently and we have so far had two interim independent workers in this role this year. Both have worked very hard to do their best to make things work, but being new to the role, not knowing the area or the staff and trying to do this at a time of such change has meant that consistency and follow through of some aspects of Panel work has not been as thorough as we have been used to or would like to achieve.

Throughout the whole year Panel has been supported by two excellent Panel Administrators. These two workers have been working for the Panel for many years and as yet again, I cannot speak highly enough of their effort, efficiency, organisational skills and good humour throughout. The Adoption Panel is indeed fortunate to have two such dedicated workers and as Panel Chair I value their contribution very highly. I am pleased that they have been assisted this year in the appointment of another member to the admin team as the huge increase of panel work maintained over the past year was difficult for them to incorporate into their already full time roles.

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

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

Areas for improvement:

As stated last year, it would be hugely beneficial if the role of Panel Adviser were to be permanently recruited as soon as possible. It is this role which provides the consistency and means of communication which ensures that the work of the Panel is carried through into Management, the teams and into everyday work.

4. Panel Roles / Tasks.

There have not been any changes to legislation or regulations during this period which have directly impacted upon the role of panel. The Panel task therefore continues to include addressing work presented as follows:

- Applications from prospective Adopters
- Matching of children to approved Adopters
- Considering Best Interest Recommendations in the cases of relinquished babies or those where no care proceedings are being pursued through court.
- Quality Assurance of work presented

Panel makes a recommendation on whether to approve prospective adopters, potential matches of children with adopters, and best interest recommendations to the Agency Decision Makers (one each for Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire Council), who then either ratify or reject the recommendation. Applicants have the right of review through the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) or a return to Panel for the case to be re-heard.

As previously stated in the last report, the work required of panel continues to be demanding but remains very interesting. During this period the numbers of cases heard at panel have continued to be high despite the increasing use of Special Guardianship Orders being encouraged by the courts. There is however a suggestion of a down turn now and some future panels have been cancelled in the next couple of months.

The introduction of the new Two Stage Assessment of adopters, combined with a new PAR form, is now firmly embedded and overall Panel generally felt that the forms are an improvement. There has been mixed feedback from the Adopters about the very strongly "Adopter Led" first stage of the assessment and a few issues with information gathered during this stage not being fully explored in stage two but some amendments to the process are inevitable when a new system is introduced and overall it has been a very smooth transition. Panel certainly feel the new PARs are easier to read, and the much increased focus on evidence and analysis is clear.

A new Child Permanence Report (CPR) has also been introduced by BAAF and it is hoped they will receive a similarly positive response overall.

There has however been an unusual increase in the number of adoption disruptions and the authority overall and the Panel are considering the information available regarding the possible factors which could have led to this, and whether or not this may include the shortened assessment process.

5. Appraisals

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

The Panel Chair is appraised by the Agency Decision Maker.

6. Panel Training

During the last round of reviews, Panel members with particular expertise were identified and indicated a willingness to share and contribute to the continued professional development of the panel.

In October 2014, an Adoption Panel Training Day was run. There were 13 attendees. The themes for the training day covered:

- The implications of the revised Adoption Regulations and Statutory Guidance
- Family Finding processes.
- The function of the Teenage Adoption Panel
- An overview of the Highs and Lows of Placement.

7. Transparency and openness

Applicants attending Panel

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

Observers

16 observers arranged to attend and observe panels during the period April 2014 to March 2015 including student social workers, members of staff on induction, members of Senior Management and prospective panel members. Over the last year there have been few Panels without one observer. Panel welcomes observing at meetings. It is an excellent way to see how Panel works and helps to demystify the process, particularly for those who will, in the future, present cases to Panel for the first time.

Panel Feedback

Applicants and social workers attending panel are asked to complete and return an evaluation form - this information is fed back to the next Panel and helps to shape panel direction

moving forward. Honest feedback is encouraged and has had a significant effect on how Panels are run. Panel has been testing a process of all questions being put to the applicants by the Chair of Panel. This has met with a mixed response both from feedback from applicants and from panel members alike so will be under review during the next report period.

I am pleased to report however that of 25 completed feedback forms, the comments from most people attending Panel have been largely positive.

8. Quality Assurance role.

Panel continues to cover its Quality Assurance roles at a number of levels:

i) Individual Issues

A Quality Assurance questionnaire has been introduced for completion by the panel jointly at the end of each case. Matters which relate to a specific case are picked up at the time and fed back to the Child Care and Adoption Teams by the Panel Adviser. This also provides the opportunity for recognition of particularly thorough and well prepared pieces of work although Panel also like to acknowledge this to the Social Workers and Applicants verbally at the time of Panel.

ii) Practice Issues

At every meeting, the Panel considers whether matters have emerged which may be affecting more than one Carer / worker which need to be followed through. These issues are taken back by the Panel Adviser to the relevant Team Manager and then the Panel Adviser will feed back to Panel any outcomes. Matters which had been raised during the previous reporting period in this category include:

- Assessments not providing enough analysis,
- Consistency of Legal Advice across the two local authorities.
- Difficulties in obtaining medical information relating to children when matching cases are presented to panel.

Panel are pleased to report that there has been a significant improvement in these areas during this period.

Matters identified during this year include:

- More detailed consideration of sibling contact plans prior to matching panel.
- Information being presented to panel regarding the proposed timescales for introductions.
- Consideration of continued contact with Foster Carers after introductions.

These matters are taken forward in the first instance by the Panel Adviser.

iii) Panel Chairs Meetings

Throughout previous years the Panel Chairs for the Joint Adoption Panel and the Fostering and Permanence Panels for Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough, have met on an

approximate three monthly basis with the Panel Advisers, Heads of Service, and the Agency Decision Makers. This has been of particular importance during the disaggregation of the BBC and CBC Children's Services.

At a meeting held in February 2014 it was decided that moving forward, both the Joint Adoption Panel and CBC Fostering Panel would meet independently with the respective Panel Adviser, ADM, Head of Service and Team Managers, Twice a year a joint meeting would be held. Bedford Borough would implement a similar timetable in relation to their Fostering Panel.

The first meeting for the Joint Adoption Panel to be held under this arrangement is due to be on 22nd May 2015.

It remains to be seen whether this frequency and nature of Panel Chairs meetings will need to be amended or not.

OBJECTIVES FOR 2014/2015

- Continue to lobby for the Panel Adviser's role to be recruited on a permanent basis in order to provide continuity and consistency throughout the whole Panel process.
- Work on the liaison between the Panel and the Adoption and Child Care teams to assist with joint working particularly given the large turnover of appointments in this area.
- Establish whether the new pattern within CBC and BBC of Panel Chairs meetings with Head of Service and Agency Decision Makers is sufficient and/or productive.

Frances M Thompson

Panel Chair – Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Joint Adoption Panel

April 2015

PANEL ACTIVITY

- Between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 2014 the Joint Adoption Panel met 22 times. Most of these were extended full day panels.
- 34 Prospective households were recommended to the ADM as suitable to adopt. (*This compares with 29 in the previous 12 months*). 1 household was not recommended to be suitable and one case was deferred for the applicants to attend to provide further information but subsequently recommended for approval.
CBC 21 BBC 13
- 50 Children (including 6 sibling groups) were recommended for match with approved Adopters. (*This compares with 51 in the previous 12 months*)
CBC 29 BBC 21

- 3 Should be placed for Adoption recommendations were considered. (*This compares with 1 in the previous 12 months*)
CBC 1 BBC 2
- There were no ADM decisions that did not agree with the Panel's recommendations. One decision is outstanding pending further information. One case went to the IRM but the ADM confirmed his original determination.
CBC 1 BBC 0

The above figures show the maintaining of levels consistent with the previous year in terms of Panel business which then showed an increase in Panel Business of over 120% over the previous 12 months (2012/13). This would appear to reinforce the need to ensure that twice monthly panels can be facilitated every month; particularly in conjunction with the reductions in 2013 to the National Minimum Standard Timescales under the 2 Part Assessment Process to 4 months from the date of commencement of Part 2 to the ADM decision. Any delay in waiting to bring an approval to Panel will result in these timescales being exceeded. Panel will monitor the level of business over the next 12 months to ascertain whether twice monthly panels should continue.