

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Monday, 9 May 2016

PRESENT

Elected Members (voting)

Cllrs Mrs C Hegley (Chairman)
Mrs A Barker
Mrs S A Goodchild
Mrs T Stock
M A G Versallion

Officers (voting)

Mr T Keaveney, Assistant Director Housing Services

Carers (non-voting)

Mr P Albon

Apologies for Absence: Cllr A L Dodwell, Vice-Chairman
Mrs S Harrison, Director of Children's Services
Mrs J Ogley, Director of Social Care, Health and Housing
Mr D Thorne, Foster Carer Representative

Members in Attendance: Cllr P Hollick

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|-------------------------|------------------|---|
| Officers in Attendance: | Mr L Butler | – Social Worker |
| | Ms D Cini | – Social Worker, Fostering Support |
| | Ms A Craig | – Practice Manager, Fostering |
| | Mr G Jones | – Assistant Director Children's Services Operations |
| | Ms S Malivore | – Social Worker |
| | Mr L Manning | – Committee Services Office |
| | Mrs K Oellermann | – Assistant Director Commissioning & Partnerships |
| | Miss N Phillips | – Practice Manager Adoption |
| | Ms M Short | – Participation Officer, Professional Standards |
| | Mr E Wong | – Head of Corporate Parenting |

Others in Attendance: Ambassadors – for Children in Care Council
Care Leaver
Foster Carer and
Foster Child

CPP/15/39. **Members' Interests**

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

CPP/15/40. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 14 March 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CPP/15/41. **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman welcomed the Participation Officer, Professional Standards and the Ambassadors for the Children in Care Council (CiCC) to the meeting. She also welcomed Ruth Coals, the Council's newly appointed Principal Social Worker and Head of Professional Standards, to her first Panel meeting.

The Chairman reminded the meeting of the efforts being made to encourage other members of the Council to attend the Panel and, in this context, she welcomed Councillor Hollick to the meeting.

The Chairman referred to an article in a recent Members' Information Bulletin (Issue 349 refers) which explained that new group or individual activities or experiences were being sought for Looked After Children and young people to take part in during the school holidays or as part of their career development including training and apprenticeships. In view of the importance of the article's content she felt that it should be repeated. The Chairman suggested that a 'taster day' be held to enable Looked After Children to shadow those in careers that were of interest to the children. She asked that anyone able to assist should contact the Council.

The Chairman advised that she had asked the Committee Services Officer to ensure that all members of the Council received an electronic alert notifying them of when Corporate Parenting Panel agendas and minutes were published.

The Chairman referred to the minutes of the previous meeting (minute CPP/15/33 refers) and stated that the possibility of placing the notes for the Member briefing on corporate parenting on the Council's intranet was still being examined.

The Chairman referred to the minutes of the previous meeting (minute CPP/15/34 refers) and the feasibility of starting the Panel's meetings at 4.00 p.m. She stated that she had met with the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations and the Participation Officer, Professional Standards to discuss this issue but certain issues remained unresolved.

The Chairman queried whether an exempt section should be included on the agenda to enable Looked After Children and young people to talk freely about their experiences and concerns and for video clips to be shown. The CiCC Ambassadors indicated their support for this whilst the Committee Services Officer stated that, as long as he was made aware of the requirement whilst preparing the agenda, he would include an exempt section.

A wide ranging discussion then followed on apprenticeship and employment opportunities for young people and the efforts being undertaken by both Central Bedfordshire and others to ensure that demand for assistance was met. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations suggested that the issues raised be considered in a spotlight report.

CPP/15/42. Adoption Service Statement of Purpose 2016/17

The Panel considered a report on the Adoption Service draft Statement of Purpose for 2016/17. The draft Statement, a copy of which was attached at Appendix A to the report, had been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 and Standard 18 of the National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2011.

The Practice Manager Adoption introduced the report and highlighted the changes which had been incorporated into the draft Statement.

The Chairman sought an update regarding the forthcoming regional adoption agencies. In response, and to set the matter in context, the Assistant Director Children's Service Operations first reminded Members that the government had introduced legislation which required local authorities to participate in regional adoption agencies. The government felt that local adoption services were too small and fragmented and that regional agencies could offer greater expertise and enable a faster and easier matching of adopters and children.

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations and Head of Corporate Parenting then briefed the Panel on the current situation regarding Central Bedfordshire Council's proposed membership of the regional adoption agency known as the Eastern Region Consortium (ERC) which operated under the lead of Coram, the UK children's charity. The meeting noted that the Consortium's 12 month project plan was expected to be made available soon and the Department for Education would decide on its suitability by the end of May 2016. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations warned Members of the possible substantial increase in funding which could be required to provide an adoption service under the ERC, although Members noted that the financial arrangements had yet to be fully costed. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations stressed that should the Consortium's service costs prove unsustainable then consideration would be given to membership of an alternative consortium.

Extensive discussion followed during which the Assistant Director Children's Services responded to Members' queries. He emphasised that the Council, like other relevant local authorities, had no direct input into the project management of the proposed regional adoption agencies; the relationship was

between the DfE and the voluntary adoption agencies like Corum who would take the lead in any consortium.

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations stated that Corum was fully aware of the Council's concerns regarding the proposals and representatives from that body were scheduled to meet him to provide reassurance. He undertook to brief the Panel regularly on developments in this area.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the Adoption Service draft Statement of Purpose 2016/17 be approved and adopted;**
- 2 that reports on the outcome of attempts to establish a regional adoption agency be submitted to the Panel for consideration on a regular basis.**

CPP/15/43. Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2016/17

The Panel considered a report on the Fostering Service draft Statement of Purpose for 2016/17. The meeting was aware that the draft Statement, a copy of which was attached at Appendix A to the report, had been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of fostering services, the National Minimum Standards (NMS) for the provision of fostering services and the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 which governed the work of fostering services throughout England.

The Practice Manager, Fostering introduced the report and drew the Panel's attention to the changes incorporated into the draft Statement since its previous version. She mentioned, in particular, the addition of a new section on foster carers and amendments to reflect the changes in the management and staffing structure of the Fostering Team.

RESOLVED

that the Fostering Service draft Statement of Purpose 2016/17 be approved and adopted.

CPP/15/44. Securing Education, Employment and Training for Looked After Children and Care Leavers

The Panel had before it a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided a summary of the work managed by the Central Bedfordshire Youth Support Service (YSS) for Looked After Children and care leavers and the help it provided in raising the aspirations of Looked After Children and care leavers as they moved towards their chosen careers.

In connection with the above the Youth Service Commissioning Manager introduced a young person to the meeting. The young person, who had arrived in the UK as an unaccompanied asylum seeker, described his educational attainments, work experience and aspirations. Following discussion the Panel thanked the young person for attending. The latter then left the meeting to attend college.

The Panel turned to consider the report before it. The report included:

- The responsibilities the YSS had to Looked After Children and care leavers
- The service the YSS provided to Looked After Children and care leavers
- How the YSS worked together with the Virtual School and Corporate Parenting Service to achieve positive outcomes
- The current performance of the YSS, including the progress for key groups and projects
- Plans for delivering YSS services and support in 2016/17.

The Youth Service Commissioning Manager introduced the report and discussion followed on a number of topics including the rapid growth in the number of unaccompanied asylum seekers, the problems in obtaining support to continue education until the age of 25 and the need to tailor the support to the individual, ensuring choices for disabled young people and the availability and standard of advice and guidance within schools.

In conclusion the Chairman stated that, whilst there had been a great deal of improvement in the quality of service offered to Looked After Children and care leavers, more work remained to be done. She was aware, however, of the restrictions placed by staff numbers and workload capacity.

The Chairman thanked the Youth Service Commissioning Manager for bringing the young person to the meeting and she undertook to write to the latter thanking him for his attendance and for describing his educational and work achievements and aspirations.

With regard to educational aspirations in general she reminded the Panel that these were lower in Central Bedfordshire than in some other local authority areas and needed to be improved.

NOTED

the services for Looked After Children and care leavers outlined in the report, the progress made to date and the areas identified by the Youth Support Service and its partners for development in 2016/17.

RESOLVED

that the development of a new Council wide approach to promoting access to apprenticeships for Looked After Children and care leavers that are employed by the local authority be supported.

CPP/15/45. **Placement Stability for Looked After Children**

At this point the Panel welcomed a foster carer and her foster child, together with additional officers, to the meeting.

The Practice Manager, Fostering introduced the presentation entitled 'Placement Stability' which accompanied the spotlight session on this topic.

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

The following matters were considered:

- How Placement Stability is measured
- Findings of the recent Evaluation Study
- Summary of Action Plan
- What makes placement stable – children's and foster carers' stories
- Questions

A social worker informed the Panel that the foster carer who was present at the meeting with her foster child had applied to adopt the child and the application was scheduled to be heard by the Adoption Panel later in the week.

Arising from the background relating to the foster child present at the meeting full discussion took place on the type and level of intervention undertaken within vulnerable families, the threshold at which action was taken and the difficulties which existed in identifying the most appropriate time at which to do so.

The Chairman thanked the foster carer and social workers for their attendance at the meeting. She emphasised the value of the debate which had been generated in relation to intervention.

(Note:

- 1 Prior to the conclusion of this item Councillor M A G Versallion declared an interest because he had known the foster carer referred to above for approximately ten years and he was a non executive director of the Luton and Dunstable University Hospital.
- 2 Prior to the conclusion of this item Councillor Mrs A Barker declared an additional interest because, as a member of the Adoption Panel, she had seen the details of the adoption application by the foster carer referred to above. She did not refer to the application when speaking at the meeting).

NOTED

the spotlight session on placement stability.

CPP/15/46. **Work Programme**

Members considered a report which provided, as context, the final part of the Panel's work programme for the municipal year 2015/16. The report also set out the proposed work programme for the whole of the municipal year for 2016/17.

The meeting was aware that an additional item had been added to the work programme during the meeting (minute CPP/15/42 above refers). In addition the aware that the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations had suggested that a spotlight report be presented to the Panel on youth support and help for adolescents in gaining further education, apprenticeships or employment.

RESOLVED

that the proposed Corporate Parenting Panel work programme for the municipal year 2016/17, as attached at Appendix A of the report of the Committee Services Manager and Committee Services Officer, be approved subject to:

- 1 replacing the report titled 'Corporate Parenting Action Plan – Annual Review', and scheduled to be submitted to the Panel on 4 July 2016, with a report titled 'Corporate Parenting Annual Report';**
- 2 including a spotlight report on youth support and help for adolescents in gaining further education, apprenticeships or employment.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.26 p.m.)

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APPENDIX A



Placement Stability

A Spotlight Session

9th May 2016

What will be covered in this Spotlight Session on Placement Stability?



1. How Placement Stability is measured?
2. Findings of the recent Evaluation Study.
3. Summary of Action Plan.
4. What makes placement stable -- children's and foster carers' stories
5. Questions?

How is Placement Stability Measured?



There are two national indicators:

- NI 62 assesses the number of Looked After Children who have had three or more placements during a financial year.
- NI 63 assesses the number of Looked After Children aged under 16 years old who have been continuously looked after for at least a period of two and a half years, but have not been in their current placement for at least two years.

How is Placement Stability Measured?



31st March 2016 Year End Performance:

| INDICATOR | 31 March 2016 | (31 March 2015) |
|---|---------------|-----------------|
| NI 62 3+Moves in 1 year (Lower = Better) | 11.9% | (13.8%) |
| NI 62 LAC 2 ½ yrs, same pl last 2 (Higher = Better) | 62.6% | (51.9%) |

The Evaluation Study



- This study was completed in July 2015.
- In-depth of the cohort that made up NI 62 and NI 63 respectively in the financial year April 2014 – March 2015
- The purpose was to identify the root causes of placement breakdown and poor performance against national targets , and then recommend actions, which are based on good national or regional good practice examples, to improve the placement stability of looked after children and improve the Council’s performance against National Indicators 62 and 63.

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Key Findings of the Evaluation Study



- 57% of the cohort were males and 43% were female. These figures mirror those of the general Looked After Children population, indicating that gender may not be a predictor of long term placement stability.
- Analysis of the length of time the children in this cohort had been looked after indicates that a majority of children had been looked after for between 2 and 3 years (63%). This indicates those children who had been looked after for more than 3 years are more likely to in a long term, stable placement. This highlights the length of time it takes to achieve placement stability for children, the importance of improving this and the need to find the right placement for children when they first become a Looked After Child.

Key Findings of the Evaluation Study



- Out of county placements were more likely to break down than those placements within Central Bedfordshire. Almost 50% more out of county placements broke down than those located in Central Bedfordshire
- A majority of children in this cohort had been in their current placement for between 6 and 8 months (34%). These figures once again highlighted the lack of long term placement stability of children despite having been in the care system for at least 2.5 years.

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Key Findings of the Evaluation Study

- An assessment of the causes of placement breakdowns identified the children's challenging behaviour as a key root cause (31%). Foster care placements were at greatest risk of placement breakdown due to challenging behaviour, which raised questions regarding the training and support made available to these carers in order to appropriately manage such behaviours, and thus promote placement stability.
- 47% of the cohort had an average SDQ score, 6% had a slightly raised score and 47% had a high score. Of the 22 children who had been in their current placement for less than 1 year, only 41% had an average SDQ score, in comparison to 58% of the 12 children who had been in their current placement for 1 year or more. This suggests that there may be an association between placement instability and a raised SDQ score.



Key Actions to Improve Placement Stability

- Establish an over arching Placement Stability Policy
- Preventative action for fragile placements is coordinated and put in place
- Multi-agency engagement in supporting placement stability
- Clinical Psychologist support to Looked After Children Teams
- Ensure views of looked after children inform on promotion of placement stability and reduction in placement moves.



What makes placement stable



The Story of N and C

Background of the girls' life prior to coming into care

N is 9 years old and C is 8 years old.

Both are girls.

They lived with parents and three older siblings until February 2009 when their mother moved to a Women's Refuge in Cornwall following sustained domestic violence by father.

Background of the girls' life prior to coming into care

- The whole family was living in one room of the home, entry to the other rooms was blocked by broken furniture, bedding and clothing.
- There were bags of general rubbish in the house and faeces smeared all over the walls. The children slept on the chairs and sofas in the same room as mother, whilst father slept in his own room.
- There were no routines or boundaries, eating when food was given or available. The children had no set bedtimes, just sleeping when they were tired. Their hygiene was neglected, with the older children being ridiculed by peers at school.

Background of the girls' life prior to coming into care

- All the children had witnessed domestic violence on a regular basis.
- Mother took the children to Leighton Buzzard because she felt the Refuge in Cornwall was too close to Wales.
- In May 2009 the children were accommodated due to ongoing concerns. It was clear mother was unable to keep her children safe and she acknowledged she could not cope.

After they had become looked after

Due to placements availability at the time

- N was placed with her younger sister C in Milton Keynes with Independent Foster Carers
- Their two older siblings were placed in Bedfordshire with Local Authority foster carers

When we first met N and C

The highs and the lows

What makes this foster placement work?

How would you describe N and C now?

How have N and C fitted into your family?



K's story

Background Information

An initial referral was received from a midwife in late 2013 expressing concerns about the fact that K's mother was pregnant. K is her fifth child.

K has 3 older maternal half siblings who are cared for by their father.

K has one full sibling who is two years older. At the time of the referral the older sibling was a subject of care proceedings.

Both of K's parents had enduring drug issues that significantly impacted on their capacity to parent their children. Their relationship also featured domestic abuse and there were concerns regarding criminal activity related to their substance misuse.

Background Information

A number of assessments had commenced given the care proceedings in respect of K's older full sibling. This included a parenting assessment and expert psychological assessment in respect of both parents. These assessments took account of K's impending birth. Sadly they concluded that neither parent had capacity to change and were unable to meet the needs of their children.

K was born four days after Care Proceedings were issued in relation to his older full sibling

A Final Care Order and Placement Order were granted in respect of K in mid 2014. This was in week 14 of care proceedings and well within the 26 week deadline. However, he remained a Looked After Child and has been in foster care waiting for adoption for 756 days.

K's journey to permanency

- K was born with drugs withdrawal symptoms. He was jittery immediately after birth and weighed 5lbs 8 ozs.
- K was given high energy SMA milk as the tremors and energy he was using to withdraw were causing him to lose weight, which had reduced to 5lbs 4ozs.
- Urine toxicology results taken from K at birth were obtained from the hospital and these were positive for morphine (heroin), methadone, methadone metabolite and benzoylecgonine (cocaine). K also had 46 mgs of alcohol in his urine.

K's journey to permanency

- Professionals were so concerned about his welfare that K was moved to intensive care due to the extreme symptoms of withdrawal.
- K recovered gradually and in May 2014 he became more alert and awake and was gaining some weight.
- After this date the dosage of Oramorphine was gradually decreased to wean him and from June 2014 he was no longer showing withdrawal symptoms.
- In July 2014 three months after his birth he was finally discharged from hospital to live with his foster care, Ellie, where he remains today.

K's journey to permanency

Following his birth the initial plan was to search for adoptive placements for K with his sister. Mindful of the possible difficulties the local authority had a parallel plan to search for separate adopters. This was because we identified the potential difficulties in securing an adopter for K given the uncertainty about his future.

At this time, there was significant uncertainty regarding the impact on K of his pre-birth exposure to drugs and alcohol. Concerns included possible developmental delay physical health issues and potential for Foetal Alcohol Syndrome.

Whilst there were a number of prospective adopters who expressed an interest in K, sadly none felt able to offer him a place in their family and all withdrew. To avoid delay for both children a decision was made that K and his sister should be placed separately for adoption.

The highs and the lows

What has made this foster placement work?

How would you describe K now?

How has K fitted into your family?

Questions?

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