

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

**This meeting
may be filmed.***



please ask for Leslie Manning

direct line 0300 300 5132

date 22 June 2016

NOTICE OF MEETING

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Date & Time

Monday, 4 July 2016 at 10.00 a.m.

Venue at

Room 15, Priory House, Chicksands, Shefford

Richard Carr
Chief Executive

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

Elected Members (voting)

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

[Named Substitutes:

Cllrs R D Berry, D Bowater, Mrs D B Gurney and G Tubb]

Officers (voting)

Director of Children's Services

Director of Social Care, Health and Housing (or the Assistant Director
Housing Services or their representative if the Director is unable to attend)

Head of Leisure and Libraries (or their representative if the Head of Leisure
and Libraries is unable to attend)

Carers (non-voting)

Only four of the foster carers' co-opted representatives will be expected to
attend at any one meeting.

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

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

AGENDA

1. **Apologies for Absence**

To receive any apologies for absence.

2. **Minutes**

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 9 May 2016 (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.	Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2015/16	* 45 - 68
	To consider a report on the activity of Children's Services in relation to Looked After Children during 2015/16 and the areas of development prioritised for the coming year.	
6.	Agency Report Quarter 4 - Fostering 1 January-31 March 2016	* 69 - 76
	To consider the Fostering Agency Quarter 4 Performance Report for 2015/16.	
7.	Corporate Parenting Service-Fostering Team Annual Report 2015/16	* 77 - 108
	To consider the 2015/16 Annual Report for the Fostering Agency.	
8.	Adoption Agency Annual Report 2015/16	+ To Follow
	To consider the 2015/15 Annual Report for the Adoption Agency.	

9. **Work Programme**

* 109 - 114

To consider the Panel's work programme.

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

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 Corum, 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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Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

4 July 2016

Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2015/16

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

Advising Officers: Gerard Jones Assistant Director Children's Services
Operations (gerard.jones@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Sharon Keenan, Practice Manager, Conference and Review Service
(sharon.keenan@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Purpose of this report

To ensure that members of the Corporate Parenting Panel have the opportunity to review and scrutinise the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Annual Report, and fulfil their statutory responsibility in accordance with the 'IRO Handbook – Statutory Guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review of Looked After Children'.

RECOMMENDATION

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

1. Note the content of the report.

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

1. This report will not be submitted to Overview and Scrutiny because its consideration falls within the remit of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Issues

Background

2. 'The IRO Handbook – Statutory Guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review of Looked After Children' states that 'the IRO Manager should be responsible for the production of an Annual Report for the scrutiny of members of the Corporate Parenting Panel'.

3. This report provides an opportunity to report on the activity of Children's Services in relation to Looked After Children, highlight areas of good practice and identify areas which require improvement. In addition the report describes the range of work the service has engaged in during the year and areas for development, which will be prioritised in the coming year.

Qualitative Information about the Service

4. The report sets out data in relation to the Looked After Children population in Central Bedfordshire.
5. There were 805 reviews held in respect of 349 children during the year from April 2015 to March 2016. The number of reviews held in respect of any individual child or young person is determined by when they become looked after, in accordance with statutory timescales and changes of circumstances which might require an additional review to be held.

Qualitative Information about the IRO service

6. The report sets out data in relation to the timeliness of reviews and participation of children and young people in their reviews.

Conduct of the service

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

Conclusions and Next Steps

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

Council Priorities

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

Promoting health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable Improved educational attainment

10. The Children and Young People's Plan 2015/2017

Priority 1: Helping children and young people achieve more

Priority 2 Protecting children and keeping them safe

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

Corporate Implications

Legal Implications

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

Financial and Risk Implications

13. The Conference and Review Service is part of the wider Professional Standards Service within Children's Services Operations. The service is responsible for the coordination and chairing of reviews for Looked After Children and Child Protection Conferences. The Quality Assurance Service has an annual budget of £1M.
14. The financial implications noted in this report relate to the need to keep under review the staffing complement in order to ensure compliance with the recommended caseloads specified in the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Handbook

Risk Management

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

Equalities Implications

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

Implications for Work Programming

17. Not Applicable

Conclusion and next Steps

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

Appendices

Appendix A – Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2015/16

Background Papers

None

Central Bedfordshire Council
www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

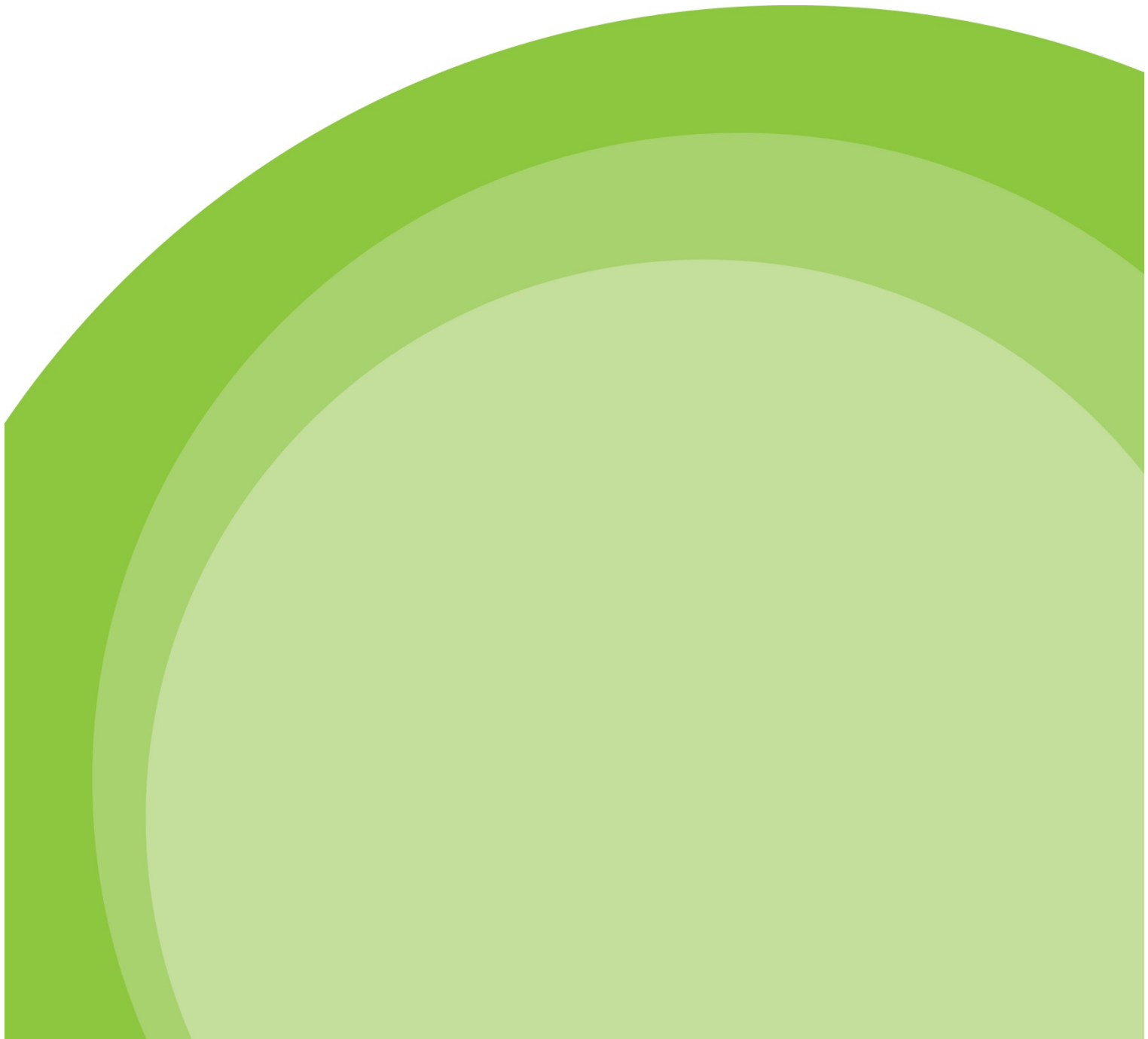
APPENDIX A

Quality Assurance
Children Services Operations



Independent Reviewing Officers' Annual Report April 2015 – March 2016

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



1.0 Purpose of Service

- 1.1 The Independent Review Officers' (IRO) role is set out in statutory guidance 2011 The IRO Handbook. The IRO's primary focus is to quality assure the care planning and review process for each child and to ensure that his/her current wishes and feelings are given full consideration. The responsibility of the IRO has widened from just the review process to an overview of the case including regular monitoring and follow-up between reviews challenging drift and delay.
- 1.2 In the National Children's Bureau research entitled 'The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in England' (March 2014), the foreword written by Mr Justice Peter Jackson makes the following comment:

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

This Annual IRO Report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Service in Central Bedfordshire.

1.3 Summary of Key Points

- A total of 805 reviews were held this year a slight decrease from 818 last year
- Timeliness and participation continues to be good
- A 100% permanent IRO and administrative staff group will ensure excellent continuity to our children.
- IRO caseloads are within statutory guidance.
- The quality assurance system, including the dispute resolution process is fully embedded and evidences an improvement in the provision of services to children and young people.
- Impact of the IRO service is illustrated through case examples
- IROs have responded to the views of young people, captured in the work with the Child In Care Council

2.0 Professional Profile of the IRO Service

- 2.1 In Central Bedfordshire the Independent Reviewing Officers' function is undertaken by IROs in Conference and Review (CRS) within the Professional Standards function of Children's Services. IROs undertake two main areas of work: Chairing of Child Protection Conferences and Looked after Children's Reviews. In addition, a small number of short break reviews when provided under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 are chaired by an IRO. Two workers undertake the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) role, in combination with the review manager role.
- 2.2 In April 2015 the Service had an establishment of 7.8 FTE (Full Time Equivalent) posts, including the LADO function. Having successfully recruited four new permanent members of staff, the last of whom started in February 2016, we have achieved staff stability over the past year and a 100% permanent workforce. This has provided a good continuity to our children.

- 2.3 In terms of diversity the team has a good gender balance reflecting the looked after children population. Workers come from a range of backgrounds, but do not fully reflect the ethnic mix of the which population. Ideally the workforce would reflect the diversity of the Looked After Children population it is serving, but within a small group a wide representation has not been achievable. Within the social work teams there is a wider range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds represented.
- 2.4 All IROs have, as required in statutory guidance, a considerable number of years' experience. IROs' previous roles include front line social work with Children with Disabilities, Looked after Children and Child Protection, supervisory and managerial experience, residential experience, fostering experience and previous work as Children's Guardians. Two IROs have recently joined as experienced IROs from other local authorities bringing different ideas and experience to CBC. The majority of the team live locally or in neighbouring authorities, and there is a good knowledge of the local area within the team.
- 2.5 All of the IROs undertake additional roles and duties, either as representatives of the IRO Service or as part of their wider role. These include:
- Monthly Quality Assurance (QA) Liaison meetings with social work teams as part of the QA strategy
 - Attendance at Multi Agency Public Protection meetings as the Children's Services representative
 - Supervision of the Parent Partnership Service which sits within CRS as an off-line management role
 - Regular liaison with National Youth Advocacy Service including review of the service level agreement for provision of Advocacy and Independent visiting
 - Participation in rolling monthly audit programme
 - Attendance at Mosaic practitioner group
 - Attendance at quarterly liaison meetings with CAFCASS
 - Supervision of the foster care Review Officer
 - Linking with the Children in Care Council (CICC)

3.0 Arrangement for Reviews

- 3.1 The Social Worker and IRO share responsibility for the review.
- 3.2 The IRO Handbook sets the expectation that children and young people are included in an age appropriate way in deciding on the arrangement for the review which is their review.
- 3.3 The CRS is responsible for the following elements of the LAC Review:
- Deciding who needs to attend the LAC review,
 - where the review should be held,
 - arranging the invitations and consultations,
 - providing reports,
 - recording the discussion,
 - ensuring timely distribution of the review record,
 - involve co-ordination between social worker, and administrative staff.

Business processes are set within the work-flow and formatting of Mosaic, the children's case management and recording system.

- 3.4 The IRO, Corporate Parenting Services and Mosaic support team are currently trialing further developments to simplify and streamline the process, improve the timeliness, and focus on the quality of the recording, ensuring IROs and social workers each take responsibility for their part of the process. This will further enhance the achievements already completed in the timeliness of social work reports for reviews and in review recording and distribution.
- 3.5 The IRO Service has additionally worked with the Participation Officer and the CICC to consult with young people on making the reviews more child friendly. This work is continuing.

4.0 Qualitative Information about the IRO Service

4.1 The Timeliness of Reviews

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

99.8% of LAC reviews were completed on time which is 804 reviews out of a total of 805.

On this one occasion there was a change of the young persons allocated IRO and a delay in setting a review in time. The possibility of this reoccurring for any young person has been addressed as the administration system records the due dates in the electronic diary when the review is booked.

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

5.0 Children's Participation

- 5.1 The IRO Handbook states that it is expected that the child if s/he is of sufficient age and understanding will be present for the whole of the Review, but this will depend on the circumstances of each individual case. The IRO may decide, in consultation with the social worker, that attendance of the child is not in the child's best interests. If the child does not attend, other arrangements should be made for their involvement. It is one of the specific responsibilities of the IRO to promote the voice of the child and to ensure their wishes and feelings are represented. It may be appropriate for a younger child to be observed or for the IRO to interact with that child through play or reading in a placement setting. If the child's first language is not English, as for example with the unaccompanied asylum seeking children an interpreter will be provided. A child with disabilities may perhaps be observed in school or placement and their needs and feelings discussed with their carers if a direct conversation is not possible.

- 5.2 The Review Record will include information on how the child participates and how their wishes and feelings were included. Participation is monitored by recording a participation code. Although, children aged under 4 are exempt from this count IRO's ensure that they seek their views in a variety of ways such as direct observation and the obtaining the views of professionals who know the child. For all other children it is expected that they should attend, or that their views should be represented.
- 5.3 Participation is considered an important performance indicator. This year 98.8% young people participated in their most recent review.
- 5.4 A total of 7 young people chose not to participate in their reviews, 6 of which were missing at the time of the review and one young person did not attend his review as he did not feel well enough but gave his views to the IRO prior to the meeting.

5.5 **Work with the Child in Care Council**

Following the success of IROs attending activity days arranged by the CICC, IROs decided to organize their own event in 2015 with the help of the Participation Officer as it was recognised that young people enjoyed meeting the IROs and spending time with them in this more informal and relaxed setting and joined in activities.

The two key questions the IROs wanted to know from the young people was "What makes a good IRO?" and "What makes a good Looked After Review?"

The key learning point which emerged from consultation was that every child's review is different for them and needs to be tailored for that individual young person.

Some common themes were identified which resulted in the development, implementation and achievement of an action plan:

- IRO now ensure that consultations about the review arrangements take place in sufficient time to allow the review to be organised taking into account the child's views.
- Consultation meetings more activity based and focus on child related activities such as IROs playing football, Lego, Chess, or going out for a coffee.
- IROs recognised the young people's wish for the reviews to be shorter, and have sought to achieve this by gathering information and consultation with professionals in advance. This has enabled the meeting to focus on the key issues for the young person whilst ensuring that the IRO has fulfilled their statutory requirements and considered all the information required.
- The Participation Officer is now a member of the Professional Standards which underpins the importance of the participation of young people and the relationship with CRS and supports the opportunities to regularly share information. The Participation Officer also attends the IRO team meetings twice a year.
- Young people and IROs felt that consultation activity events were successful and a fun way to form and build positive relationships and inform improvement to the service. The next event has been planned with the Participation Officer and will take place in Summer 2016.

IROs used this feedback to inform their thinking about future reviews at their own IRO Practice Development Day in January 2016, facilitated by an external organization.

6.0 Parental Participation

- 6.1 The IRO Handbook advises that the IRO should seek the views of birth parents and any other adults with parental responsibility and other significant persons in the child's life, for example extended family members.

Parent's active participation is achieved through attendance, completion of a consultation booklet, representation via an advocate or social worker, in writing or consultation by phone or in person with the IRO separately from the review meeting. Consultation booklets are sent out by CRS to all parents whose whereabouts are known unless the IRO advises there are inappropriate circumstances.

Overall 72% (582/805) of reviews record parental participation, reflecting one or both parents either attending 33% (266/805) or contributing to the review process. There is a far greater participation by mothers than fathers. Mothers' views were obtained for 67% (541/805) of reviews, fathers for 41% (334/805). For those cases where parental views are not obtained the reason is recorded. In a small percentage 4% (10/223) of cases a parent has died.

There are some parents whose whereabouts are unknown 8% (66/805) of mothers, 18% (162/905) of fathers. In some cases parents are invited but do not attend 15% (121/805) mothers, 13% fathers (107/805). If they do not choose to attend or to complete the consultation leaflet they can still contribute their views if they wish to do so but a proportion do not choose to take up the opportunity.

7.0 Service User Feedback

- 7.1 IROs will respond promptly and informally to questions and queries arising from young people, their parents and carers. This process of engagement resulted in every concern raised being resolved through an informal discussion and exploration of the matter and consequently no complaints were received.

Positive feedback is often verbal and hard to capture. One example comes directly from a young person placed in a potential adoptive placement. Sadly after a great deal of thought and consideration amongst professionals and lead by the IRO it was agreed that the young person would need to leave this adoptive placement and move into a foster placement. This move occurred and the IRO who had been a consistent figure in this young persons life went to visit him. On meeting the young person in this new placement he smiled, a smile that the IRO had not seen for a long period of time and confirmed to the IRO that although this was a very challenging and difficult decision to take it had clearly been the right one for this child who now displayed in the first time in a very long time that he was happy.

8.0 The Conduct of the Organisation in Relation to the Review

- 8.1 Conference and Review (CRS) sit within Professional Standards and the quality assurance role is central to the IROs' responsibilities. The IRO is responsible for monitoring the performance of the Local Authority, including effective challenge of poor practice, and has a crucial role in ensuring that the Council fulfils its responsibilities as a corporate parent for all the children it looks after.
- 8.2 The IRO completes two monitoring forms after each LAC Review. One of these sits within the Mosaic review episode and records information about the arrangements, who has been consulted, participation by parents and children, completion of required documentation, Health Assessment, Personal Education Plan and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. In addition a word form gives qualitative feedback in respect of care planning, children's participation, and appropriate involvement with family and partnership working with other agencies.
- 8.3 The Line Manager receives both feedback forms. Feedback on practice will include good practice as well as any areas of concern. The qualitative feedback is RAG rated focusing on the care the child has received and challenging any concerns in respect of the social work practice or wider service provision. The Line Manager will share with the social worker in supervision and if any identified actions are needed, ensure these are completed.
- 8.4 Conference and Review hold monthly Quality Assurance Meetings with each of the fieldwork teams. A Fostering Manager also attends which helps to pick up any concerns within placement. A Summary Report is provided by Conference and Review which is also circulated to the relevant Heads of Service. This process ensures that feedback on practice is shared with the individual worker and manager and an overview is given to heads of service.
- 8.5 Examples of good practice are highlighted in the Quality Assurance Liaison Meetings and recorded in the Minutes.

A Professional Standards Newsletter contained a sample to highlight good practice to social workers and managers, however until recently the Head of Professional was a vacant post and it is envisaged that publication of this newsletter will resume as it has not been published for some time.

9.0 Conduct of the Organization in Relation to the Case

Procedures for Resolution of Concerns

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

- 9.3 In the Guidance, the IRO has a duty to monitor the Local Authority's performance overall, not just in respect of the review of the child/young person's case. So, the IRO should identify poor practice, and must negotiate with the Local Authority's managers up to the highest level. Referral to CAFCASS will usually occur when a dispute raised through this process has not been resolved in a timely way. The IRO Service has implemented the CAFCASS and Independent Reviewing Officer Good Practice Protocol for Public Law Work. This has helped to ensure cases in proceedings are subject to robust analysis and challenge about matters of critical importance to the child's safety wellbeing and permanency needs. An IRO comment on final care plans is now fully embedded and IROs have contributed to timely care planning and case progression by appropriate challenge to any identified delay.
- 9.4 If an IRO considers that a matter involves a breach of a child's human rights the matter should immediately be raised as a formal dispute.
- 9.5 Most other concerns will be raised with the Team Manager through the existing Quality Assurance Process. A 'RAG system' is now in place ensuring that more urgent or serious matters are highlighted. Cases rated amber or red are tracked through the Liaison Meetings until resolved or escalated into formal dispute, if appropriate, again until resolved.
- 9.6 A failure to respond or a failure to resolve a concern through the Quality Assurance Process will lead to a formal dispute being raised, in accordance with the Dispute Resolution Procedure.
- 9.7 The number of concerns has decreased this last year reflecting the improvements in the quality of work undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Team. Most concerns identified continue to be raised and resolved through our quality assurance process. Areas of concern that have been identified have included the following issues:
- Late or poor quality recording of case notes
 - Delay in achieving timescale of managers responses to child's review
 - Concerns re contact
 - Concerns re pathway plans/care plans
 - Concerns about the services offered to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
 - Concerns about timely progression of life-story work

Case examples of the impact of the IRO are given at the end of the report.

The follow-up and feedback mechanism within the Quality Assurance Process is working well. A formal Dispute Resolution procedure is in place with agreed timescales and escalation process when issues have been identified by an IRO and action is required.

- A small number of disputes have been escalated to Head of Service
- The Assistant Director has been consulted on one occasion
- Independent Legal Advice or a referral to CAFCASS has not been required.

These escalations have arisen due to differences of opinion between professionals within Children's Services and been resolved as the Head of Corporate Parenting chaired complex case discussions enabling a thorough exploration of the concerns and options and contributing positively to an agreed resolution.

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

- 10.1 CRS are appropriately resourced to deliver an effective IRO Service. There have been some pressure points recently due to the rise in the numbers of children and young people who have become looked after and subsequently the numbers of reviews required, however this is being closely monitored.
- 10.2 The Corporate Parenting Service is now fully staffed with permanent employees which assists to ensure continuity of care for children and young people.
- 10.3 Placement choice for young people in semi-independent accommodation was identified as an area of development. The Corporate Parenting Service Action Plan includes the delivery of the sufficiency strategy and expects IROs to identify and escalate any concerns. During this last year the range of choice in semi independent accommodation has varied and a tendering exercise is currently taking place to review this provision.

11.0 Progress of Action Plan 2015-2016

- 11.1 In partnership with Research in Practice a tailored support workshop was held in February 2016, 'The role of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs): What does the research tell us?' which was attended by all IRO's. Following the success of this workshop we are pursuing a further opportunity focusing on 'the role of Quality Assurance for Independent Reviewing Officers', to review our knowledge and strengthen our impact on the performance and outcomes of the local authority.
- 11.2 Following the identification of a national gap in Post Qualifying opportunities for IROs a bespoke Post Qualifying course has been developed by the University of Birmingham. This is an accredited course which carries 20 MA credits. Two IRO's from Central Bedfordshire Council have been supported to attend and their learning will benefit both them as individuals and their team, who will share learning in the learning.
- 11.3 The IRO Service have maintained, strengthened and developed partnership working with colleagues in CBC and in partner organisations. Managers in other service areas have been invited to our team meetings to inform and develop practice and improvements. We work closely with the Virtual School and IROs ensure oversight of Personal Education Plans and the use of the Pupil Premium, and escalate any concerns. A representative from CRS attends the monthly legal issues meeting.
- 11.4 A permanent Foster Care Review Officer has recently been appointed and is managed within CRS. The Review Officer will regularly attend CRS team meetings and it is envisaged that this new arrangement will support a closer working relationship with all IRO's and the joint views regarding quality of placement. Regular meetings are also planned with the Fostering Service to correlate the information with the supervising social workers.
- 11.5 The IRO Service has worked closely with the Corporate Parenting Teams in respect of Placement Stability. As part of the Corporate Parenting Team Action the CRS have contributed too a comprehensive audit of young people plans who had more than 3

placement moves in one year. This has been concluded and as a result a Placement Stability Action Plan has been drawn up to address the identified learning. CRS have extended the use of disruption meetings chaired by an IRO for occasions when long term placements break down to now include young people whom are in a placement for 12 months or more. An annual evaluation is also completed by CRS in line with good practice identified within the adoption process. The IRO Service also attends a Monthly Permanency Tracking meeting as part of the strategy to prevent placement breakdown and ensure permanence is secured for young people in a timely manner by effective care planning and case progression using appropriate challenge to any identified delay.

- 11.6 Ongoing improvements have been made to the effectiveness of the Quality Assurance Feedback loop with the commissioning team. The monitoring form has been revised to include feedback on Commissioned Services, including placements, The Children's society, CAMHS provision and other specialist services. Both the Commissioning Manager and the Quality Assurance Manager from Commissioning continue to attend CRS Team Meetings ensure ongoing communication to improve services and outcomes for children. IROs provide commissioning a copy of the monitoring form, including comment on the services provided and the Quality Assurance Officer provides a quality assurance report to the IRO for each placement caring for a young person.
- 11.7 CRS have continued to develop their own learning and knowledge about Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and ensuring within the reviewing process that CSE risks are being appropriately considered, identified and responded to. The CSE coordinator has attended CRS team meetings to ensure that the local knowledge and any learning is disseminated to IRO's and as a result the risk of CSE is considered at every young persons reviews. In preparation for the recent Ofsted inspection all of the identified cases, many of whom had an allocated IRO, were subject to a comprehensive multi agency audit. The audit and findings were shared to ensure ongoing learning and any actions were followed up as necessary for some individual young people. The CRS team participated in a national webinar focusing on CSE.
- 11.8 The IRO Service has developed practice in respect of monitoring and tracking between reviews. This is needs based rather than timetabled so the level of oversight and progress chasing will be dependent on the child's circumstances. All IRO activity in respect of the child is now recorded on the child's record and following a successful trial of the use of mobile technology within CRS this is currently being rolled out for all IRO's. The use of mobile technology will provide a more accessible, alternative form of communication for young people with the use of Skype and facetime and provide a different medium to obtain their wishes and views via the different applications that are available.
- 11.9 The Participation Officer has recently moved to Professional Standards and has attended IRO team meetings to ensure that we continually review the knowledge and experiences of young people within care. An IRO is now a member of the Corporate Parenting Board to offer an independent overview of the needs of young people whom are looked after.

12.0 Annual Work Programme for Next Year – detailed action plan in appendix

- Respond to recent and emerging National Guidance

- Contribute to development of practice and implementation of multi agency development following recent inspection focusing on CSE/Missing
- Review the LAC Review format and implement changes to ensure that they are child focused and engaging with young people in a meaningful way
- Contribute to the work on placement stability, findings of recent audit and subsequent action plan when published.
- Develop closer working with the Foster Care Reviewing Officer on the Quality of Placements
- Continue Development of the Work with the CICC
- Ensure appropriate and proportionate case overview by IROs

IRO Impact - case examples

These case examples illustrate the impact of the IRO Service, representing the voice of the child and challenging the Local Authority when the care it is delivering is not as good as it could be. In some cases the matter was resolved through the formal Dispute Resolution Process, in others the IRO was able to influence a positive outcome working collaboratively with colleagues. The names are not used in these examples.

Case 1 - Advocating for the young people's wishes

One young person J had been known to Children's Services since 2008, and was accommodated in March 2012 and placed with her grandmother who became a foster carer. J was eleven years of age and due to transfer to school in September 2016. J was an incredibly bright young person, exceeding all of her targets and some of her achievements had been published. She was a member of the school council and enjoyed extra curricular activities that supported her future aspirations that were funded via the Pupil Premium.

J and her grandmother had identified the school that she wished to transfer to, however this was not agreed due to the schools Ofsted rating and the guidance that all Looked After Children should attend a school with a high Ofsted rating. This was discussed within the PEP meeting and LAC Review. J had visited the school and spoke positively about this experience. She described it as a very friendly and welcoming school. She thought that it was good and that the school was improving, which she had also read in the local newspaper. J felt that she would achieve at this school and her friends were also transferring there.

The IRO was concerned that J would lose her motivation and passion for learning if her wishes and feelings were not prioritized and she was made to attend a school she did not want to attend. The IRO consulted with J's grandmother and other professionals including representatives from education. As a result it was agreed that the wishes and feelings of the young person should be prioritised and professionals would support J to attend the school of her choice.

J was informed of this decision and subsequently secured a place in the school of her choice. J was delighted that her voice was listened too and she was given to the same opportunity as other young people and her peers.

Case 2 – Supporting a young person’s contact with birth family

D and G, aged 17 and 15, were accommodated in 2002 and placed with foster carers. The siblings were made subject to Care Orders in 2004 and they have remained with the same foster carers since 2003 who are committed to both of the children. The plan is for the children to remain in this placement until at least they have finished their education which is likely to be 19 years of age when the Local Authority will support funding the placement under the Staying Put policy.

Sadly in 2008 and 2014 the children’s birth parents died, however they have contact with their maternal grandparents twice a year in the summer and near to Christmas. They also see their paternal grandmother and wider paternal family including cousins and uncles as and when they wish.

As the IRO at a LAC Review, the issue of contact was raised not just for those members of the family that they currently had contact with but also their young brother who was adopted. D and G told the IRO that they wished to see him as they previously had contact with when he was young but this has faded out over the last few years.

As a result the IRO requested the social worker to pursue the possibility of contact with the adoptive parents of their brother. The social worker contacted the adoptive parents who spoke to the child and it was agreed that contact could be arranged. This is currently being pursued and is soon to be arranged as an initial date was postponed to enable their adoptive brother to accept the news regarding the death of his birth mother.

Case 3 – Challenging delay in providing for a young person’s needs

N had been known since to Children’s Services since 2006 and was accommodated in 2013. N and his sibling were placed in foster care and made subject of Care Orders by the court due to the ongoing concerns regarding the care that they received from their parents. It was agreed that they will remain in long term foster care and they have been in the same foster placement for eighteen months and the foster carers wish to care for these children on a long term basis, which is being progressed. N is 10 years of age and is diagnosed with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, challenging behaviour and a medical condition that required an operation.

At a LAC Review the IRO discussed in the young person’s transition plan the need for additional support whilst his Educational Health Care Plan Assessment (EHCP) was being completed. It was important that additional support was in place and implemented transition was a success.

The IRO identified a delay in providing this extra support at school and challenged this and escalated the concerns via Virtual School. A meeting was held and as a result extra hours were provided by Virtual School of 15 hours one to one support for 6 weeks.

This is currently still in place whilst his Education, Health and Care Plan Assessment is being completed.

Case 4 – Engaging with family members

Y was an unaccompanied child asylum seeker aged 14 years of age. He was accommodated and placed in foster care. Within the first LAC review the IRO raised the point that we had yet to make contact with the young person's parents and their views were not known about their son being accommodated by the local authority. The IRO recommended that he and the social worker and IRO would call the parents using an interpreting service.

Y's parents were delighted to hear from the professionals providing care to their son and most importantly they gave verbal consent for the local authority to care for him. The parents were able to seek answers and reassurance about their son and how he would be cared for and were able to provide essential information about his physical, social and emotional needs.

It was agreed that in addition to the contact between Y and his parents', the local authority and Y's parents would regularly communicate to ensure that they were kept up to date with his progress and his legal status.

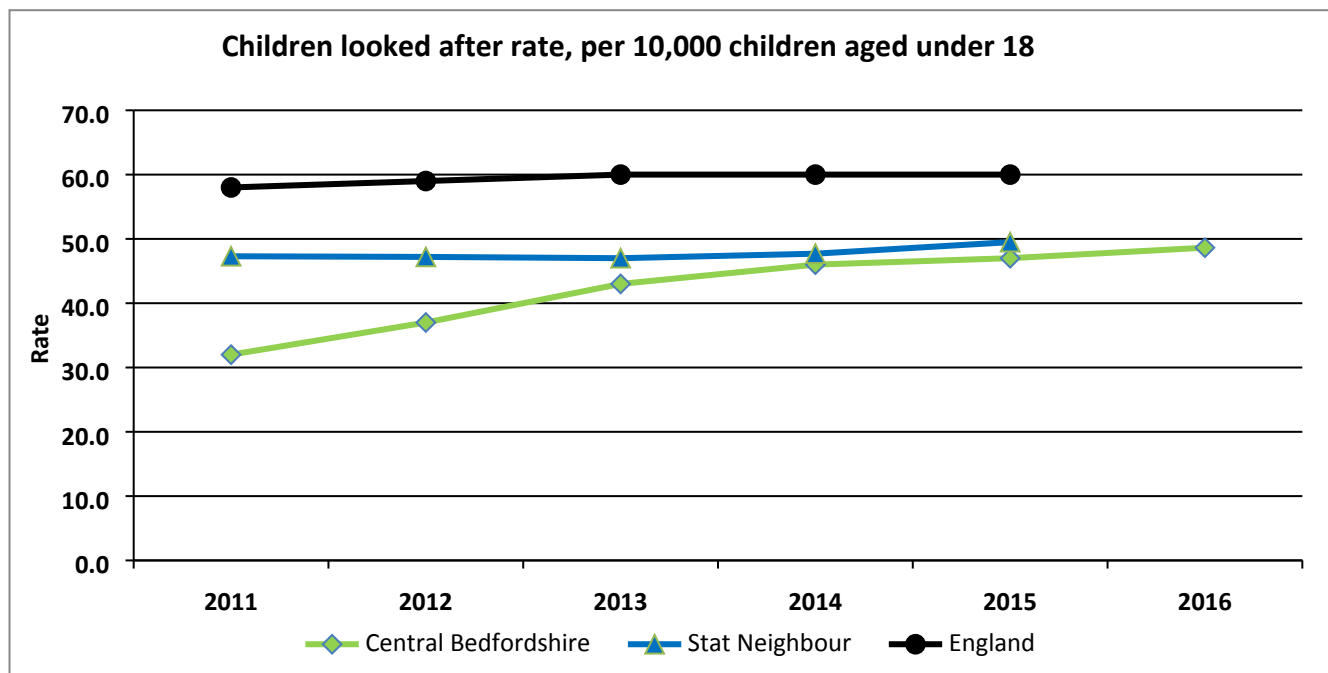
Sharon Keenan
Practice Manager
Conference and Review Service

Appendix A

Quantitative Information about the IRO Service

A total of 349 children have been through the review system in the 12 months ending 31/03/2016.

A total of 805 reviews were held in the year.



Notes

- (i) The Looked After Children population for the past six years is shown above. This is shown as a "Rate per 10,000" to enable comparison with other areas. The year end figure for Central Bedfordshire is currently reported as 285, up from 274 in March 2015. National, regional and statistical neighbour rates are also shown above. Of this total 11.9%, that is 34 of these young people are unaccompanied asylum seeking children, this compares to our statistical neighbours at 4.0% and national figure of 2.9% (2014-2015).
- (ii) The IRO Handbook recommends that case loads for IROs need to be between 50 and 70. In CBC the IROs undertake both the IRO and conference chair roles. Calculated on per child basis caseloads at 28/03/16 average 68, a rise of 8 since last year. This figure has varied over the year and there are variations between workers. The size of caseload alone does not indicate the workload for each IRO. The number of other responsibilities, the number of out of county placements, large family groups and complex case needs will also impact on the work load. Staffing and CP/ LAC numbers have remained reasonably stable over the past year, which would suggest that staffing level are appropriate at present, although nearing the recommended capacity. However management re-modelling has led to a wider range of additional tasks being undertaken by the IROs as detailed in 2.5. This is of positive benefit but the on-going monitoring of

the case and the timeliness of case recording and administrative tasks can be compromised by the demands of additional workload responsibilities.

Composition of the Looked After Children Population (as of: 31/03/16)

Total 285

Ethnicity

	White	Mixed	Asian	Black	other
CBC Local School Population	89%	5%	2%	2%	1%
National Funded School Population 31/01/12	78%	4%	9%	5%	2%
CBC Children Looked After 31/03/16	76%	9%	3%	5%	7%
National Children Looked After 31/03/15	79%	10%	2%	6%	2%

Age

Age at 31 March 2016

	BOYS	GIRLS	Total CBC	% CBC	National 31/03/15
Under 1	6	11	17	6%	5%
1-4	18	24	42	15%	15%
5-9	40	28	68	24%	21%
10-15	50	44	94	33%	38%
16-17	47	17	64	22%	22%
18 & over and placed in a Community Home	0	0	0		
TOTAL	161	124	285	100%	100%
CBC %	56%	44%			
31/03/15 National %	55%	45%			

Legal Status

Legal Status at 31 March 2016

	CBC	% CBC	National 31/03/14
Care Orders Interim	29	10%	11%
Care Orders Full	149	52%	49%
Voluntary Agreements under S20 (Single Period of Accommodation)	70	25%	29%
Placement Order	37	13%	11%
Sentenced to CYP A 1969 Supervision Order with Residence Requirement	0	0%	-
On remand, committed for trial, or detained	0	0%	-
Emergency Orders or Police Protection	0	0%	-
TOTAL	285	100%	100%

Placement

Placement at 31 March 2016

	CBC	% CBC	National 31/03/14
Foster Placement with Relative or Friend	31	11%	75%
Placement with other Foster Carer	167	59%	
Secure Unit	1	9%	9%
Homes and Hostels	25		
Hostels and Other Supportive Residential Placements	0		
Residential Schools	0	0%	1%
Other Residential Settings	0	0%	2%
Placed for Adoption (Including placed with Former Foster Carer)	17	6%	5%
Placed with Own Parents	9	3%	5%
In Lodgings, Residential Employment or Living Independently	29	10%	3%
Absent from Agreed Placement	0	0%	-
Other Placement	2	1%	-
	4	1%	
TOTAL	285	100%	100%

Action Plan 2016-2017

Priority	Actions	Timescale	Outcomes
Respond to recent and any emerging National Guidance <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Achieve permanence long term foster placements and ceasing to look after a child 2. Promoting the health and well- being of looked after children 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Brief IROs through circulation, discussion at team meeting highlighting of key changes and IRO responsibilities. 2. Develop practice guidance with corporate parenting 	<p>June 2016</p> <p>September 2016</p>	Implementation of statutory guidance.
Contribute to development of practice and implementation of action plan following recent inspection focusing on CSE/Missing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. IROs to ensure CSE/missing episodes are considered and that where appropriate a risk assessment and safety plan are in place. 2. IROs to review return interview records and ensure any necessary actions have been identified. IRO's to record a case note to this effect. 3. IROs to ensure QA challenge is made to social work teams and to other agencies as needed. 4. Ensure sex and relationships education is in place/ has been provided, if gap identified raise with team and virtual schools and ensure addressed. 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>June 2016</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	CSE/Missing is always considered, risks are identified, up to date safety plans are in place.
Review the LAC Review format and implement changes to ensure that they are child focused and engaging with young people in a meaningful way	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review the current LAC review format and explore alternative practice. 2. If changes are identified regarding the format of the LAC reviews - create and implement an action plan 3. Explore alternative options available, including computer technology to ensure 	<p>November 2016</p> <p>July 2016</p>	The LAC review is child centred and the voice and participation underpins the review.

	that the voice of the child in central to the review process, for example Skype, language line.		
Contribute to the work on placement stability, findings of recent audit and subsequent action plan when published.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Ensure effective IRO representative at placement stability panel and ensure IROs are identifying placements at risk and contributing to panel as appropriate. 5. Enhance the use of disruption meetings for foster care placements and evaluate and disseminate the learning from these. 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>6-monthly report on learning</p>	Improved Placement Stability
Develop closer working with the Foster Care Reviewing Officer on the Quality of Placements	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Monitoring forms to be routinely copied to Foster Care review officer. IROs to give qualitative feedback and offer challenge where appropriate. 2. IROs to complete contribution form for all annual reviews where they have been the IRO for a child in placement during that period. 3. Foster Care Reviewing Officer to attend CRS team Meeting Quarterly 	<p>In place</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>April/July/ October/January</p>	IROs contribute to improved placement quality
Continue Development of the Work with the CICC	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Timetable annual consultation events 2. Identified IRO to lead on this and feed into LSCB sub group, in partnership with an appointed young person. 	<p>September 2016</p> <p>Twice Yearly</p>	IROs listen and respond to the voice of children and young people.
Ensure appropriate and proportionate case overview by IROs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop practice standards for IROs setting clear expectations so that case overview is proportionate according to need and risk. 2. For identified high risk cases, for example CSE IROs to have an increased level of overview and more regular contact with the young person. 3. Develop the use of multi agency care planning meetings when children/young 	<p>September 2016</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>September 2016</p>	IROs offer a proportionate level of scrutiny and support dependent on the individual child's circumstances.

	<p>people going through a significant transition</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Embed the use of the Dispute Resolution Framework including, threshold, timescales, flow chart and recording processes. 5. Brief social work teams on expectations and on their responsibility to ensure IROs are advised of any significant changes for a child. 6. Quality Assurance systems are enhanced to incorporate all information obtained from professional standards to triangulate information from Audit manager, Consultant Social workers and reported at Performance SMT bi-monthly. 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>September 2016</p> <p>September 2016</p>	
Review the Mosaic workflow system	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. IRO, Corporate Parenting Services and Mosaic support team to ensure that the LAC process, support the workflow to improve timeliness, and focus on the quality of the recording, and the tasks is correctly allocated 2. Training to be provided to IROs and social workers to ensure care plans are SMART. 	<p>June 2016</p> <p>July 2016</p>	<p>Ensure care plans appropriately reflect the child's needs and are available to robust challenge by the IRO.</p> <p>Review minutes and decisions agreed and distributed in a timely manner.</p>

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Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

4 July 2016

Agency Report Quarter 4 - Fostering 1 January-31 March 2016

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, Corporate Parenting Service, Fostering
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Purpose of this report

1. Fostering Services Regulations 2000 requires the Fostering Agency to monitor and control the activities of the Fostering Service and ensure quality performance. Quarterly reports are presented to elected Members in order to outline the activities in the Fostering Service so that members can monitor and feedback on the quality and performance of the Service.

RECOMMENDATION

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

1. Consider and note the Fostering Agency Quarter 4 Report.

Issues

2. 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 regularly on the activities of the Service.
3. This is the fourth quarter report for the financial year 2015/2016.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

4. During January, February and March 2016, a variety of recruitment activities and events took place in line with the Fostering Services recruitment strategy.
5. In terms of outreach work 5 activities took place (one in January, 3 in February and 1 in March). These included a presentation to Job Centre

Plus in Leighton Buzzard, attendance at 2 information stands at events at Queens Park Academy and All Saints Church in Bedford. An information event was held at Millbrook village hall and a drop in session in Dunstable; both events are where members of the public are invited to attend if they want to find out more about fostering.

6. In relation to advertising, throughout this quarter we had a page sponsor with East of England Online with an editorial in their digital magazine. A half page advert was placed in Bedfordshire on Sunday advertising fostering in general and 2 forthcoming information events. Leaflets and information booklets were shared with teachers at a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) training session. Posters and information booklets were distributed to the police, fire service, health representatives, the Rufus Centre and parish councils. A 7 foot poster promoting fostering was placed in Dunstable Shopping Centre; the image used was relevant to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). An A5 fostering advert was placed in 'Info Central; your guide to council services, spending and key contacts for 2016/2017'. This was sent to all homes in Central Bedfordshire with Council Tax bills.
7. Press coverage took place in the form of an editorial which included interviews with 2 CBC foster carers in Bedfordshire on Sunday. An article (which also advertised the fostering drop in) was placed in Staff Central. A press release and article regarding LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender) adoption and fostering week was placed in the Times and Citizen.
8. Online posts have continued to be promoted during this quarter. Editorials about fostering, The LGBT fostering and adoption week and forthcoming drop ins were placed on the Fostering Facebook and Central Bedfordshire Facebook and Twitter pages. An article titled 'Central Bedfordshire Council seeking homes for children during LGBT Adoption and Fostering week' was placed on Bedfordshire on Sunday's website. Editorials were also placed on Bedfordshire News and Bedfordshire News website. Email messages/alerts were also sent from the CBC email alerts system to residents in Central Bedfordshire area regarding fostering and a forthcoming fostering drop in session that was due to be held.
9. As a result of the recruitment that took place during this period the Fostering Service received a total of 24 enquiries: 8 in January, 9 in February and 7 in March (this is 8 more than in the last quarter). There were 15 Initial Visits during this period: 4 in January, 4 in February and 7 in March (this is 3 less than in the previous quarter). There were 5 application forms received during this period: 2 in January, 0 in February and 3 in March (this was 6 less than in the previous quarter). The best form of recruitment by far during this period was via the website.

Assessments

10. During this period 15 new assessments were started: 6 career carer, 3 Regulation 24 (temporary approval), 1 Family and Friends and 5 Special Guardianship Order (SGO) assessments. As of the 31st March 2016, there were a total of 11 assessments in progress: 5 for career carers, 1 Regulation 24, 2 Family and Friends and 3 SGO assessments.
11. During this quarter 10 fostering households were approved, 9 as career carers and 1 as a family and friends carer.
12. As of the 31st March 2016 the Fostering Agency had a total of 104 fostering households, 82 of these were career carers.
13. In relation to the ethnicity of foster carers and children placed, there is a good match of ethnicity with foster carers broadly reflecting the ethnicity of our children in care.

Ethnicity		
<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Foster Carers</i>	<i>Looked After Children</i>
White	173 (91%)	217 (76.1%)
Dual Heritage	2 (1%)	26 (9.1%)
Black or Black British	9 (5%)	8 (5.3%)
Asian	5 (3%)	15 (2.8%)
Other	-	19 (6.7%)
	189 (100%)	285 100%

14. As of the 31st March 2016 there were a total of 117 children placed with in house foster carers (59%), compared to 82 (41%) with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). The number of children placed with in house carers is increasing year on year. At the end of March 2014 the percentage of children placed in house was 46% , by the end of March 2015 this had increased to 54%, by the end of March 2016 it was 59% and as of the 4th April it is now 62%. Our aspiration is to increase this further to 70% as there will always be children that need to be placed out of the area or in IFA/residential placements. This will not only improve services to children in care who will have local placements to better meet their needs and it will also decrease our reliance on more expensive IFA placements.
15. As of the 31st March 2016 there were 130 Special Guardianship Orders in place (compared to 131 at the end of the last quarter). Although Special Guardian Order (SGO) carers are generally expected to access universal services, they are entitled to seek support from the Local Authority as and when required. The Fostering Service continues to work with a small cohort of families who contact the service sporadically for support and advice. On average the service works with about 5 families a month and will undertake visits, or provide telephone

support in order to meet the needs of individual carers. The main area Special Guardianship Order (SGO) carers seek support with is in relation to contact; children's behaviour or support in financing respite or holiday activities.

Referrals/Placements

16. During January, February and March 2016 there were 11 new fostering placements made: 0 in January, 2 in February and 9 in March. This is a decrease of 12 new placements compared to the last quarter. Out of the 11 new placements made, 6 were placed in house (5 under 2's and a 12 year old), 2 were placed in IFA's (1 UASC and a 12 year old), 1 was placed in semi-independent living, 1 was placed in a parent and child placement and 1 was placed in a residential home.

Training

17. During this quarter foster carers accessed a wide range of training opportunities to help them develop their knowledge and skills. The Fostering Service provided 13 specialist in house training courses which included: childcare emergency first aid, strategies for dealing with challenging behaviour, specifically those who go missing, challenging behaviour, de-escalation and restraint, sexual exploitation, safer caring, allegations, contact and working with birth families, supporting educational achievement, supporting the health of LAC and a Margo Sunderland conference on teenagers locked in rage and hate. The Service also enabled foster carers to access e-learning training on the following subjects: Adolescence, brain development and positive parenting, an introduction to safeguarding, equality and diversity and understanding pathways to extremism and prevent programme, child protection, safer caring, attachment and brain development, sexualised behaviour, safe sleeping for babies and early child development. Carers also accessed the shared training programme provided by Early Years and Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB), these included; Autism Spectrum conditions, understanding sexual trauma, crisis intervention, meeting the needs of 2 year olds, developing children's cognitive skills, teenage relationship violence, breaking away from print (storytelling), parental substance misuse, enabling play and a Makaton workshop.
18. As of the 31st March 2016 there were 68 fostering households that had completed their mandatory Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD's) and 23 households were yet to complete their portfolios but still had time to address within the required timescales. 7 households were overdue in completing their TSD Standards and were outside the required timescale. Supervising social workers and the Marketing, Recruitment and Training Officer were providing additional support to help these carers achieve the standards.

Ofsted Notifications

19. 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 no notifications.

Allegations

20. During this period there were no allegations made regarding foster carers.

Complaints

21. During this period there were no complaints made against the Fostering Service. 1 prospective foster carer did write to her MP because she was unhappy that the Fostering Service had decided not to follow through her interest in fostering a specific child. One of the fostering managers and social work assistant undertook a joint visit to explain the decision.

Compliments

22. During this period there were 16 compliments received covering a range of work undertaken. An IRO gave very positive feedback about 2 foster carers regarding the care they were providing to 2 LAC. A compliment was also forwarded by an IRO following an adoption review. He stated that the adopters spoke very positively of the foster carers regarding introductions. They stated that 'the foster family were lovely and went beyond what would have been expected during introductions. They provided a "full on service" by doing everything so they (the adopters) could concentrate entirely on the girls'. The adopters were very grateful for this and seemed overwhelmed by how much the foster carers did to facilitate the introductions. A childcare social worker gave very positive feedback regarding 1 set of foster carers who had moved from being IFA carers to CBC ones and were caring for a sibling group of 2. The social worker stated that 'they are consistently meeting the children's needs and are providing the care that they need to be able to develop and achieve their potential'. A thank you card was also received from a family and friends carer thanking the assessing/supporting social worker for 'all her help and support'. The remaining compliments were made by Fostering Panel either in relation to the quality of the written work submitted or presentation of social workers at panel. The panel secretaries were also complimented as the departing panel adviser who had worked for various Local Authorities stated that they were 'the best she had ever come across'.

Annual Budget

23. For the financial year 2015/2016 Adoption and Fostering Service within Children's Services had a combined annual budget of £3,673,263.

Reporting to Members – Legal Requirements

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

Risk Management

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

Staffing

26. 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 2 fostering teams. During this period there have been a number of staff changes with some experienced senior assessing and supervising social workers moving on. This has enabled the service to creatively develop staffing roles i.e. changing some roles from seniors to social workers and expanding the number of hours worked so as to accommodate the number of new carers coming through as well as making savings in relation to the overall staffing budget. All vacant posts have now been recruited to with some staff already in post and others to follow shortly.

Council Priorities

27. The Children and Young People's Plan 2015-2017; Priority 2 Protecting children and keeping them safe. Fostering is a key statutory service to Looked After Children.

Legal Implications

28. 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.
29. 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.

30. 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.
31. This report provides updating information to allow consideration of the performance of the Fostering Agency. As the report is provided in accordance with timescales and does not highlight any issues, there are no further legal implications.

Financial and Risk Implications

32. The Fostering and Adoption provisional outturn for the financial year 2015/16 is a £414k overspend (a rise from the overspend reported in quarter three of £347k). This is mainly due to inter agency costs and the rise in child arrangement/special guardianship orders and adoption allowances.

Equalities Implications

33. 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
34. This report highlights that a range of methods are being used to attract prospective carers from diverse backgrounds. A good match is being achieved in terms of ethnicity, with foster carers broadly reflecting the ethnicity of our children in care. Equality training is being provided to all foster carers.

Conclusion and next Steps

35. During this quarter the service continued to focus on progressing the number of assessments taking place through to panel for approval. During this period 9 new 'career' carers were approved which enabled the service to meet its recruitment target of 15 new carers in the financial year 2015/16. Although the recruitment target for 2016/17 is only to recruit 10 new foster carers this will be a challenging target as the focus will be on recruiting those carers who are harder to recruit to i.e. carers who can take older children, sibling groups and children with challenging behaviour.

36. As of 31st March 2016 59% of children were placed with in house foster carers compared to 41% with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). The % of children placed in house has increased on a month by month and year by year basis. This has not only enabled the Local Authority to make significant savings in relation to our use of more expensive IFA placements but it has also meant that we have more choice in terms of available placements and therefore better matching has taken place.
37. For the second quarter running there has been no need to report any issues/concerns to Ofsted and there have been no allegations or complaints. During this quarter a high number of compliments were received. This is not only because the service is better at now reporting good areas of work but it is also an indication that foster carers are well trained/supported and when issues arise they receive a quick response from the Corporate Parenting Service who work extremely well together to support foster carers.
38. In conclusion this has been a positive end to the financial year with targets met and an increase in the number of in house placements. This has enabled children to be placed in local resources that better meet their needs, where there is more choice in relation to placements and placement stability has been enhanced because foster carers are receiving the appropriate training and support to help them provide a high standard of care to the children placed with them.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

None

Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

4 July 2016

Corporate Parenting Service - Fostering Team Annual Report 2015/16

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

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

Annie Craig, Practice Manager, Fostering
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Purpose of this report:

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

RECOMMENDATION

The Corporate Parenting 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

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

Corporate Implications

Risk Management:

4. Regulatory Risks: The provision of sufficient and suitable foster placement is a key activity monitored by Ofsted during inspection, forming part of their judgement about services for Looked after Children.
5. Child Protection Risks: Failure to recruit or retain sufficient foster carers would be a child protection risk.
6. Reputational Risk: Recruitment of foster carers is a competitive market activity and has a high media profile.
7. 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

8. This report provides updating information to allow consideration of the performance of the Fostering Agency in the previous year as required by legislation. As the report is provided in accordance with timescales and does not highlight any issues, there are no further legal implications.

Financial and Risk Implications

9. This report provides updating information and does not include any financial decision / implications.

Equalities Implications

10. 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

The following equality issues have been reported:

- All staff have access to the Council's extensive Learning and Development Programme and can apply to attend external courses and conferences where appropriate. This includes 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.
- In order to ensure a range of foster carers are recruited for Central Bedfordshire children a range of marketing and recruitment activities have taken place during the year. These have included outreach work; advertising; press coverage; online posts/websites/Facebook and twitter pages.
- Each year the Fostering Service produces a comprehensive training programme covering a wide range of topics to help foster carers develop their skills and knowledge
- The Family Link Scheme offers short breaks to children of all ages who have a physical or functional disability.
- The Youth Care Scheme provides specialist care to young people over the age of 10 years who have needs which are particularly challenging or complex.
- This year has seen a significant increase from the previous year in terms of the number of males being accommodated compared to females. It would be advisable to give further consideration to the causes of this trend.
- 45% children fostered are from BME communities. This indicates a possible over representation of BME children in the LAC population which should be given further consideration.
- 91% of foster carers are White. This indicates that further initiatives may be required to encourage and support more foster carers to come forward from different BME communities

Conclusion and next Steps

12. 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 2015/16

Appendix B – Chair of the Fostering and Permanence Panel Annual Report
2015-16

Background Papers

None



Appendix A

Fostering Agency

Annual Report

**For the period
2015 - 2016**

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SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTION

- 1.0.1 This report describes the activity of Central Bedfordshire Councils Fostering Service during the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016, 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 fostering agency required under the Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards 2011.
- 1.0.3 This report will be presented to the Central Bedfordshire Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and a quarterly update will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

SECTION 2 – Staffing/Service Structure

- 2.1.1 The Fostering Service was made up of the following full-time equivalent staff:-

- 1 x Practice Manager
- 2 x Team Managers
- 3 x Senior Social Workers (2.5 full time equivalent)
- 9 x Social Workers (8 full time equivalent)
- 1 x Family Support worker
- 1 x Marketing, recruitment and training officer (works across the adoption and fostering service area)
- 1 x Marketing, recruitment and training support officer (works across the adoption and fostering service area)
- 1 x Fostering Panel Adviser (0.71 (25/37 hours) full time equivalent)
- 1 x Panel Secretary
- 2 x Business Support Officers

The Fostering Service has also had access to a clinical psychologist (2 days a week) for 6 months of this financial year.

- 2.1.2 The service has remained largely fully staffed this year, apart from the last quarter when some long standing senior/social workers moved on to take up new opportunities. This has enabled the service to creatively develop staffing roles i.e. changing some roles from seniors to social workers and expanding the total number of available hours the service can provide. This has enabled the service to provide supervision/support to the number of new carers who have been approved during the year as well as make saving in relation to the overall staffing budget. During this quarter the service also operated with 1 vacant manager's post placing additional responsibilities/work on the remaining manager and practice manager. By the end of the financial year all vacant posts had been recruited to although not all staff were in post.
- 2.1.3 The workforce is diverse and the majority of staff has extensive post qualifying experience. A programme of induction and additional support is in place for those newly-qualified or in the early years of their social work career.
- 2.1.4 All staff has 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.

- 2.1.5 The team carries out the full functions of the fostering agency with social workers completing a range of fostering work, including foster carer assessments, supervision/support, reviews etc. In addition the fostering service is involved in the assessment and support of Special Guardianship Order (SGO) carers.
- 2.1.6 The fostering service is supported by specialist staff across the Corporate Parenting Service and works particularly closely with the Placement and Resource Team whose staff are responsible for making placements and foster carer payments.

SECTION 3 – The Fostering Permanence Panel

- 3.1.1 The Fostering and Permanence Panel usually meet twice a month depending on demand. During the period 1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016 the panel met on 21 occasions.
- 3.1.2 The Fostering and Permanence Panel considers applications from prospective foster carers and makes recommendations as to their approval. First Annual Reviews and those where there has been a change in carers' approval or where there have been a complaint or allegation are presented to Panel for consideration. The Panel also make recommendations in relation to children being matched to their permanent foster carers.
- 3.1.3 The attached Fostering Panel Chairs Report (Appendix B) includes valuable information and feedback on the function of panel business, statistical information as well as panel business.

SECTION 4 – SPECIALISED FOSTERING

4.1 THE FAMILY LINK SCHEME

- 4.1.1 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.
- 4.1.2 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. Period of short breaks will be carefully planned and can be for a few hours occasionally or whole weekends on a regular basis.
- 4.1.3 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.
- 4.1.4 On the 31 March 2016 there were 6 Family Link carers approved. These carers were supporting 5 children by providing regular short breaks. There was also a salaried family link fee-based carer who was linked to 4 children and 1 adult who had complex medical needs.

4.2 THE YOUTH CARE SCHEME

- 4.2.1 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.
- 4.2.2 As of 31 March 2016 there were 6 approved Youth Care Households, caring for 6 children.

SECTION 5 – CHILDREN AND FOSTERING

5.1 CHILDREN ACCOMMODATED

- 5.1.1 Between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016 108 children were accommodated (compared to 107 in the previous year) 53 of these children were placed with in house foster carers. 19 were placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). 3 were placed in parent/child units, 7 were placed in residential care, 2 were placed in secure and 24 were placed in semi-independent living.
- 5.1.2 29 of the young people placed either with in house foster carers, Independent Fostering Agencies or in semi-independent living were unaccompanied asylum seekers.
- 5.1.3 The referral for the child/young person which includes essential and preferable matching criteria, which are 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.
- 5.1.4 Respite placements were provided as and when needed on 52 occasions. In addition 5 children had regular monthly respite as part of their care plan. Youth carers were provided with 16 periods of respite as part of the Youth Care agreement.
- 5.1.5 Of the referrals for foster placement 12 came through the Emergency Duty Desk Service, this compares to 16 in the previous year.
- 5.1.6 As at 31st March 2016 there were a total of 117 children living with in-house foster carers (compared to 105 as at 31st March 2015) and 82 living in Independent Fostering Agencies (compared to 90 as at 31st March 2015). This represents 59% of children placed with in-house carers (compared to 54% as at 31st March 2015). This increase of in-house placements 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 Central Bedfordshire Council to make significant savings in terms of placement costs as more children have been accommodated in homes which is more cost effective than placing children in IFA's . When children do need to be placed in IFA's there is a regional Framework Agreement in place to commission these placements. The agreement sets out quality and cost standards for placements with 18 preferred providers. This agreement has enabled the council to reduce the average cost of placements and there are clearer expectations in respect of quality and outcomes for children.
- 5.1.7 As a result of their success in meeting the recruitment target the Fostering Service needed an additional supervising social worker to supervise/support the additional foster carers approved during the year. A number of long standing senior social workers were leaving the service and a review of the staffing compliment took place with the senior

posts transferring into social work posts. This enabled the service to recruit an additional supervising social worker without incurring any additional cost to the service.

5.2 AGE, GENDER AND ETHNICITY OF CHILDREN REFERRED FOR FOSTERING

- 5.2.1 Over half the children accommodated between the 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016 were aged 0-5 years, the age distribution was as follows:

0-4 years	40 children	(37%)
5-10 years	10 children	(9%)
11-15years	29 children	(27%)
16+ years	29 children	(27%)

From the age profile of children accommodated compared to last years cohort it is clear that more older children were accommodated this year.

Of the 108 children accommodated between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016 73 (68%) were male and 35 (32 %) were female. This evidences a significant increase from the previous year in terms of the number of males being accommodated compared to females. In 2014/2015 there were 52 males (49%) compared to 55 females (51%).

- 5.2.2 In terms of recording of ethnicity of the 108 children accommodated between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016; 59 were White/British; 11 were Eritrean, 7 were dual heritage, 6 were Iraqi, 6 were Vietnamese, 4 were black/African, 4 were Afghani, 2 were White/European; 2 were Black/British, 2 were Syrian, 1 was Kurdish, 1 was Black/Asian, 1 was Turkish, and 1 was Iranian.

5.3 SIBLING GROUPS OF CHILDREN REFERRED FOR FOSTERING

- 5.3.1 There were 7 sibling groups within the children accommodated during the year, 2 groups of 2, 1 group of 3, 2 groups of 4, 1 group of 5 and 1 group of 6. One of the significant criteria for matching children with carers is enabling them to be placed with siblings, wherever possible. Out of these sibling groups 4 groups were assessed as needing to be placed together and were (2 x sibling group of 2 and 2 x sibling group of 4. 3 sibling groups were assessed as needing to be placed together but had to be placed separately (1 sibling group of 3, 1 of 5 and 1 of 6). Large sibling groups are more difficult to match with suitable carers as many fostering households do not have lots of bedroom vacant for fostering.

SECTION 6 – FOSTER CARERS

6.1 RECRUITMENT OF FOSTER CARERS

- 6.1.1 The Fostering Service's recruitment target for 2015/2016 was to recruit 15 new fostering households and this was achieved. In order to ensure a range of foster carers are recruited for Central Bedfordshire children a range of marketing and recruitment activities have taken place during the year. These have included outreach work; advertising; press coverage; online posts/websites/Facebook and twitter pages.

- 6.1.2 Between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016 there were 105 enquiries by people who were interested in becoming foster carers, 64 of these enquiries then progressed to an Initial Visit where they are provided with more in depth information about fostering. Out of these 64 Initial Visits, 30 prospective foster carers then sent in an application form to foster. 15 of these applications then progressed into career carer assessments and were subsequently approved as foster carers.
- 6.1.3 The best months for enquiries were July (14) June (12) and September (13). The worst 3 months were December (3) and August (3).

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

- 6.2.1 All assessments are carried out in accordance with the National Minimum Standards and Statutory and Practice Guidance. All prospective foster carers are required to attend in-depth 'Skills to Foster' training as part of the preparation and assessment process.
- 6.2.2 In terms of assessments completed between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016 there were 59. These assessments would have been a mixture of Regulation 24, temporary approval (18); full Family and Friends, (12); Career Carers (15) and Specialist Guardianship Order (SGO) assessments (14).
- 6.2.3 During the year there were 18 requests for Regulation 24 placements (temporary approval) to allow immediate placement to take place. 11 of these carers were given temporary approval.

6.3 SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDERS (SGO'S)

- 6.3.1 The Fostering Service are also involved in the assessment of SGO carers and in providing additional support when universal service do not meet the specific needs of SGO carers.
- 6.3.2 Between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016 the Fostering Service completed 14 SGO reports and recommended 9 for agreement at Court. Court, however, agreed to recommend 10 out of the 14 SGO's. In addition court agreed 9 SGO's that were completed by Family Support Team.
- 6.3.3 As at 31 March 2016 there were 130 Special Guardianship Orders in place (compared to 114 at the end of March 2015). The Fostering Service work with a small cohort of families during the year, who contact the service sporadically for support and advice. On average the service works with about 5 families a month and will undertake visits, attend meetings or provide telephone support in order to meet the needs of individual carers/children. The main areas in which Specialist Guardianship Order (SGO) carers seek support are in relation to contact, children's behaviour or support in financing, respite or holiday activities.

6.4 ETHNICITY OF CARERS

- 6.4.1 As at 31 March 2016 there were a total of 189 foster carers living within 104 households. The breakdown of ethnicity regarding these carers was described as follows:

White 173 (91%)
Dual Heritage 2 (1%)
Black or Black British 9 (5%)
Asian 5 (3%)

SECTION 7 – TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR FOSTER CARERS

- 7.0 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 to more complex/specialist post-approval training.

7.1 SKILLS TO FOSTER

- 7.1.1 New fostering applicants have many questions prior to and during the assessment process. As an essential part of the fostering assessment preparation to become a foster carer the 'Skills to Foster' training examines issues that are relevant, such as what it will be like to have children placed with them, or working in tandem with the ideal authority in order to reach positive outcomes for children.
- 7.1.2 Spread over several dates, this course provides an opportunity for prospective foster carers to reflect on their values and attitude to caring and learn more about the skills and attributes needed to become a foster carer. During 2015/2016, the Fostering Service ran 4 'Skills to Foster' courses with 38 delegates attending.
- 7.1.3 As part of the application and assessment process, all applicants must complete Emergency First Aid training. 7 courses were held during 2015/2016 and these were attended by 77 delegates.

7.2 SONS AND DAUGHTERS

- 7.2.1 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 3 events took place, one event was held at Caldecott (10 attendees) which is an outdoor activity centre, another event was at Nerf Zone (9 attendees) which was a foam dart activity and the third event was a visit to a pantomime (22 attendees).

7.3 INDUCTION

- 7.3.1 Following approval, foster carers enter their 12 month induction phase into the service and are required to complete Training, Support and Development (TSD) Standards.

7.4 THE FOSTERING TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

- 7.4.1 Each year the Fostering Service produces a comprehensive training programme covering a wide range of topics to help foster carers develop their skills and knowledge. During this

financial year a total of 39 specialist in-house training courses were provided (compared to 43 in the previous year) on 14 subjects (compared to 24 in the previous year).

- 7.4.2 In April 2015, the range of training that the Fostering Service could access was extended to enable foster carers to access training provided by the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB), Social Care, Virtual Schools, Domestic Violence and Early Years Teams. Foster Carers are now able to book these courses on line and are able to access various e-learning as well as more traditional classroom based training. Twenty six different training courses were accessed by foster carers from this shared training programme. Having access to many specialist courses enables foster carers to tailor their training to suit their specific requirements based on the needs of the children they have in placement, at well as ensuring they attend the core training required by the National Minimum Standards for the Fostering Service.

SECTION 8 – SUPPORT FOR FOSTER CARERS

8.0 THE FOSTERING SOCIAL WORKER

- 8.0.1 The fostering social worker is responsible for the foster carers ongoing assessment and support and must provide regular supervision that addresses their learning and development needs. It is the key role of the fostering social worker to support foster carers in meeting the National Minimum Standards required in the care they provide to children and young people.

8.1 ADVISE AND MEDIATION SERVICE

- 8.1.1 Independent advice and mediation is provided to foster carers via Fostering Network (a national organisation supporting foster carers). This service is primarily used for foster carers during an allegation as it helps to have independent support and advice during these times. In previous years a contract has been agreed with Fostering Network to provide this service. As this service has historically been under utilised the service took the decision in April 2015 not to continue with the contract but to spot purchase this service as and when it is required. During this financial year there have been no requests to purchase this service.

8.2 FOSTER CARER SUPPORT GROUPS

- 8.2.1 Local monthly support groups are held for foster carers across the county. These groups are held in Dunstable, Millbrook and Cardington and have been well attended throughout the year.
- 8.2.2 Monthly support groups are also held for youth carers. For part of the year a clinical psychologist attended this group in order to provide clinical supervision/support and help and aid placement stability.
- 8.2.3 Two evening social events for foster carers also took place over this financial year and included a fish and chip supper (32 adults and 13 children attended), and a Buffet Bake Off (19 adults and 22 children attended).

8.3 CELEBRATION OF FOSTERING EVENT

- 8.3.1 A Celebration of Fostering event is held every year to recognise the commitment, loyalty, hard work and achievements of our foster carers and their families. This year the event was

held at Woburn Safari Park and was extremely well received with 79 adults and 80 children attending. Staff from the Corporate Parenting Service attended as well as the Chief Executive, Assistant Director, Operations and the Portfolio holder. 13 foster carers received awards this year; 8 for 5 years' service, 2 for 10 years' service, 1 for 15 years' service and 2 for 25 years' service. Special awards were also presented for carers in the following categories:

- Outstanding contribution to caring for children with disabilities
- Brilliant family and friends foster carer
- Fabulous foster carer
- Outstanding contribution to fostering
- Special sons and daughters

8.4 FOSTER CARERS TALK TIME

- 8.4.1 This event is held quarterly and gives foster carers the opportunity to meet with Fostering Managers and other senior managers to discuss fostering issues. It also allows the Corporate Parenting Service to update foster carers on developments within the service. Four Talk Times were held in this financial year with a total of 52 carers attending. 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.

8.5 THE MENTORING SCHEME

- 8.5.1 The mentoring scheme currently has five foster carer mentors who specialise in their own areas such as care of teenagers, short term care for younger children, long term care and one mentor with vast experience of the different schemes. All newly approved foster carers are allocated a mentor at the time of approval and existing foster carers are able to access the scheme during challenging times or if they require additional support. During this financial year 21 mentees were supported by this scheme.

8.6 OUT OF HOURS SERVICE

- 8.6.1 Fostering managers and social workers from the Fostering Service provide an 'out of hours' telephone support service for foster carers. A mobile phone is 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.
- 8.6.2 Feedback from foster carers indicates that this service is highly valued. Outside of these hours foster carers will contact the Emergency Duty Team.

8.7 THE FOSTER CARERS ASSOCIATION

- 8.7.1 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 quarterly newsletter. During this financial year events that the Foster Carers Association provided included a Halloween Party, a Christmas Party, Picnics, Crafting Sessions and a trip to Wicksteed Park.

8.5 FOSTERING NETWORK AND BAAF MEMBERSHIP

- 8.5.1 The Fostering Service is a corporate member of 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.
- 8.5.2 Central Bedfordshire Council remained a full member of BAAF until closure in August 2015 – BAAF was a leading organisation representing fostering and adoption agencies and provided training courses, practice, guidance, research material, and a consultation and advice service to all its members. In August 2015 a new organisation, Coram/BAAF was established and continued to provide policy, research, professional advice and training.

SECTION 9 – SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDERS

- 9.1.1 The Fostering Service is involved in the assessment and support of Special Guardianship Order carers (SGO's). The number of Special Guardianship Order carers in Central Bedfordshire has been increasing year on year. As at 31 March 2016 there were 130 SGO's in place compared to 114 as at 31 March 2015.
- 9.1.2 The majority of SGO Carers receive a financial allowance and access universal services; however a small number contact the service for advice, support and guidance. Between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016 the Fostering Service worked with 36 families (compared to 29 for the previous year). The areas of support requested from families were as follows:

Contact	9
Behavioural management issues	8
Risk assessment needed	4
Financial support	3
Respite	3
Support re SGO breakdown	3
Allegation/concerns	2
Play therapy/CAMH support	2
Complaint	1
Transfer to another local authority	1
Support regarding house move	1
Support filling out forms	1
Update	1

SECTION 10 – NOTIFICATIONS

- 10.1.1 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.
- 10.1.2 Between 1 April 2015 and 31st March 2016 there were no notifications sent to Ofsted (compared to 19 for the previous year). The high numbers last year were mainly to do with children missing from placement and the Fostering Service were notifying Ofsted when children were absent but not missing. The service is now only notifying Ofsted if children are missing and there whereabouts are unknown.

SECTION 11 – ALLEGATIONS

- 11.1.1 Allegations against foster carers are dealt with in accordance with Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB), procedures for managing allegations/concerns about foster carers. All foster carers who are, subject to any allegation are offered independent support from the Fostering Network's Advice and Mediation Service.
- 11.1.2 Between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016 there were 4 allegations of misconduct made against foster carers and (this is the same number as last year). All allegations made were referred to the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) but none reached the threshold for investigations. The allegations made as outlined:
- A child stated that their prospective family and friends' carer pushed them. The assessing social worker dealt with this issue with the foster carer.
 - Issues were raised regarding the behavioural management strategies used by a foster carer. This was dealt with by the Fostering Service as a Practice Issue.
 - An allegation was received from a neighbour of a foster carer who stated that the child in placement was refused food and was spoken to inappropriately. This was dealt with as a concern and the fostering social worker addressed the concerns with the foster carer.
 - An allegation was made against a foster carer in relation to their adopted child. This was referred to the access and referral team but no further action was taken. It later transpired that this had been a malicious allegation.

SECTION 12 – COMPLAINTS

- 12.1.1 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.
- 12.1.2 Between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016 there were no complaints made (compared to 6 complaints made in the previous year). Only 2 of the complaints made in the previous year were upheld and the learning from these was then put into practice as a way of improving practice. Although not classed as a complaint, 1 prospective foster carer did write to their MP because she was unhappy that the Fostering Service had decided not to follow through her interest in fostering a specific child. One of the fostering managers and social work assistance undertook a joint visit to explain the decision more fully with her.

SECTION 13 – COMPLIMENTS

- 13.1.1 Compliments about service delivery from customers and for their representatives are recorded within the service as these alongside complaints and comments can be shared to promote learning and make improvements.
- 13.1.2 Between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016 the Fostering Service received 37 compliments (compared to 15 in the previous year). Many of these compliments were made in relation to the excellent work foster carers are doing. For example at an adoption review the adopter spoke very positively about the foster carers during the children's introduction to them. The adopters stated that 'the foster family were lovely and went beyond what would have been

expected during introduction. They provided a 'full on service' by doing everything so they (the adopters) could concentrate entirely on the girls'.

- 13.1.3 Fostering staff have also received several compliments from foster carers, child care social workers and IRO's (Independent Reviewing Officers), Fostering Panel, regarding the support/training they have provided to foster carers and in relations to the quality of work produced. In court the solicitor for a Child praised the quality of the assessment presented by one of the assessing social workers. The fostering panel also regularly compliment presenting social works on the quality of the work they are presenting to panel. The panel secretaries have received compliments. One of the interim panel advisers who had worked for various Local Authorities in this role stated that the panel secretaries were 'the bet she had ever come across'. Birth parents have also sent in compliments, one sent a complimentary letter thanking the foster carer 'for all her work' and another sent a thank you to a social work assistant for all her support during a court hearing.

SECTION 14 – OFSTED

- 14.1.1 Ofsted last inspected the Fostering Service in December 2012 when the service was judged to be good overall.
- 14.1.2 Ofsted have now changed their format for inspections with the Fostering Service now being inspected as part of the Children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leaver inspection process. Inspections can take place at any time and one is likely to take place in the near future.

SECTION 15 – CONCLUSION

- 15.1.1 This has been another successful year for the Fostering Service. For two years in a row the Fostering Service has met its recruitment target for foster carers. Not only has the service increased the number of foster carers it now has but it has also decreased its usage of more expensive Independent Fostering Agency placements.
- 15.1.2 At the end of March 2014 only 46% of our looked after children were placed with in house foster carers. By the end of March 2015 this had increased to 54% and by the end of March 2016 it had increased to 62%. Our aspiration is to increase this further to 70% as there will always be children that need to be placed out of area or in IFA/residential placements or in semi-independent living.
- 15.1.3 The increase of in house resources has enabled CBC to make significant savings on placement costs as IFA placements are significantly more expensive than in house foster placements. Placement choice has been improved which has enabled better matching of children. More children are in local placements that better meet their needs and where support is more readily available.
- 15.1.4 There have been very few changes in the way the Fostering Service provides services this year. The primary purpose of the Fostering Service is to provide high quality, safe, secure and caring foster placements for children who are unable to live with their birth families. The service continues to provide placements that meet this requirement. The quality of the work undertaken by the Fostering Service and the support and training offered to foster carers has been excellent. This is evidenced in the low level of allegations, lack of

complaints/notifications and the high level of compliments and positive feedback the service has received this year.

- 15.1.5 In terms of the forthcoming year the service needs to continue to concentrate on increasing the number of in house foster carers so that more children can be placed with carers who can appropriately meet their needs locally. The recruitment target for 2016/17 is to recruit a further 10 foster carers; however this will be targeted recruitment as the service has sufficient foster carers to care for young children but needs to increase the number of foster carers who can care for older children, sibling groups, children with complex needs and asylum seeking young people.
- 15.1.6 During 2016/2017 the Fostering Service also plan to review the Youth Care Scheme, develop the Supportive Lodgings scheme and look at a more therapeutic model of working with foster carers.

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

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Appendix B

Fostering Agency

**Annual Report by the Chair of the
Fostering and Permanence Panel**

**For the period
2015 - 2016**

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SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTION

- 1.0.1 This report covers the year from 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016. From 1 April to 23 September, the Panel was chaired by Kathy Bird, and from 7 October to 31 March 2016, was chaired by Suzannah Robinson. This has been a busy year, with twenty-one Panels having been held which usually has meant two Panels a month. As well as the change of Chair, Panel has seen a number of other staff changes that will be addressed in the body of this report.

SECTION 2 – PANEL MEMBERSHIP

- 2.1.1 During the first half of the year, Panel was chaired by Kathy Bird, as it had been since 2005. Kathy was an experienced Social Worker and Manager, having worked mainly in the areas of Fostering, Adoption, Child Protection, Children with Disabilities and Residential Care. Kathy worked as an Independent Consultant for seventeen years for a range of Local Authorities and Voluntary Organisations. She was independent of Central Bedfordshire Council, as required by the Fostering Regulations 2011.
- 2.1.2 I am also a qualified Social Worker, with experience in Fostering, Adoption, Child Protection, Looked after Children and Residential Care. I am currently employed part time by another Local Authority as an Independent Reviewing Officer and Child Protection Conference Chair, and I sit as a Panel Member for the shared Adoption Panel hosted by CBC and an IFA Fostering Panel. I undertake Independent Social Work, mainly in the form of fostering assessments and parenting assessments, and I deliver training in Parent and Child Fostering. I am independent of Central Bedfordshire Council.
- 2.1.3 Fostering Regulations require that Panel runs with a minimum of five members including the Chair or vice-chair and a social worker with a minimum of 3 years' experience in order to be quorate. Panel runs with a preference of seven members where possible to ensure quoracy in the event of any conflicts of interest or unexpected absences. CBC has two vice-chairs, one of whom is independent.
- 2.1.4 Panel continues to have a central list of Members from which attendees are drawn. This list currently comprises of the following:

Independent Members:

Vice Chair: Social Worker – Reviewing Officer, Fostering Team Manager (another LA), Chair of two IFA Panels

Social Worker, Guardian ad Litem

Educational Psychologist, Former Foster Carer for IFA

Social Worker, former Guardian ad Litem, Local Authority and Independent Social Worker

Social Worker and trainer, previously Reviewing Officer, Panel Member for other LA's.

Foster Carer for IFA

Adoptive parent and Magistrate

Adviser and Teacher of children from Gypsy and Traveller families

Foster Carer for another Local Authority

CBC Members

Vice-Chair: Social Worker – Senior Practitioner (Adoption) CBC, Emergency Duty Team

Elected Council Member, experience of children with disabilities
Social Worker – Children with Disabilities team

- 2.1.5 It is important that the composition of the Panel reflects as far as possible the diversity of the wider local community. At this stage, Panel Members range in age from 35 to 67, include both genders and come from a variety of heritage and ethnic backgrounds.
- 2.1.6 Panel Members have shown a varied commitment to attending Panels, depending on their availability and other commitments. There is a core list of Panel Members who are able to commit to attending most Panels, whilst other Members have more limited availability. As Panel dates are set for the year ahead, all Panel Members are able to indicate their availability in advance and commit to as many Panels as they feel they can manage. It is rare for a Panel Member to withdraw at short notice and has only happened in exceptional circumstances.
- 2.1.7 On a number of occasions this year, additional Panels have been required by the agency which involves significant administrative effort to ensure Panel will be quorate.
- 2.1.8 Because of the volume of work, Panel Members have to allow several hours of reading for each Panel, and all come well prepared. It is clear that all paperwork is always read, as Panel Members come with a good level of understanding of the issues, and always with areas they require further clarification on.
- 2.1.9 The process of payment for Panel Members will change from 1st April 2016, with the ability to claim travel expenses removed, and the flat fee increased. This change will reduce administrative processes.

SECTION 3 – PANEL ADVISER

- 3.1.1 Panel has had three different Panel Advisers this year. From April to September, an agency worker undertook the role, then another agency worker took over until a permanent Adviser was recruited in December. Due to unforeseen personal circumstances, this Panel Adviser resigned within one month of starting, the previous agency Panel Adviser was recruited to return to the role on a permanent basis, thus minimising any disruption to the service. The impact of this, alongside a new Chair, has been that this has limited CBC's opportunity to further develop areas of the Panel.
- 3.1.2 The role of Panel Adviser, although not statutory, is crucial to the functioning of the Panel. The Panel Adviser spends a considerable amount of time ensuring that all paperwork is ready for Panel, available in time and complies with regulations and good practice guidelines. The Panel Adviser is the link between the Panel Chair, Panel Members and the Fostering Team and is available at Panel to give advice as needed. The Panel Adviser also takes back issues raised by Panel to the Practice Manager, and co-ordinates the responses to those issues.

SECTION 4 – PANEL SECRETARIES

- 4.1.1 During this period, Panel has been supported by two Panel secretaries. The quality of this support remains consistently high. These secretaries are shared with Adoption Panel so usually have to support four Panels a month. The volume of work is significant but timescales and deadlines are always achieved. Papers are with Panel Members without fail eight working days before every Panel, minutes are swiftly produced and are of a very high standard, and any additional requests for help or information are

responded to very quickly. The Panel Chair, Panel Adviser and Members have all found this an invaluable support.

SECTION 5 – PANEL TASKS

5.0.1 The Fostering and Permanence Panel's primary legal function is to make recommendations about the approval of Foster Carers including first reviews, subsequent reviews (which take place every three years), changes of approvals and reviews following allegations or complaints, as well as matches of children on a permanent basis to Foster Carers. The Local Authority must ensure that all prospective Foster Carers are considered by Panel before approval and placing children. The only exceptions to this process for approving people as Foster Carers are in relation to connected persons, when a Local Authority can place a child with a relative, friend or other person connected to a child for up to sixteen weeks without referring it to a Fostering Panel, and a Local Authority can grant temporary approval as a Foster Carer to a prospective adopter for a named child. (Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.)

5.0.2 At the twenty-one Panels held during this period, the following was achieved:

99 cases were presented in total, a breakdown of this figure is as follows:-

30 were presented for approval to include:

- 15 new households were recommended and agreed by the ADM as approved Foster Carers
- 12 approvals were Family and Friends carers
- 1 household was not recommended for approval (ratified by the ADM)

(1 Family and Friends and 1 Foster Carer request for approval was presented twice as originally deferred)

33 were annual review to includes:

- 6 were first annual reviews, approved with no change
- 4 were first annual reviews approved with a change
- 17 were subsequent annual reviews approved with a change
- 2 were subsequent annual reviews approved with no change
- 4 were annual reviews following a complaint, allegation or concern, one of which resulted in a termination of approval.

12 were extensions of temporary approval.

24 were matching children to their permanent foster carers, 6 of which included sibling groups.

In addition, 26 variations of approval were acknowledged.

5.0.3 For a number of these cases, Panel gave advice regarding outstanding work, matching considerations or gaps in the information available.

5.0.4 Although in the majority of cases, Panel supports the recommendation of the Social Worker, there have been occasions when Panel has not reached a unanimous conclusion, has advised a change in the terms of approval, or has deferred a case in order to secure validation of some of the information provided by the prospective carers. The ADM has

agreed with all the recommendations from Panel apart from one occasion when the terms of approval were amended.

- 5.0.5 Panel Members feel confident in robustly challenging information they are given, both in their questions to Applicants and Carers and their Social Workers, and in their recommendations. Panel Members are encouraged to contribute to the summary of strengths, and going forward, will be asked to more consistently provide reasons for their recommendation. This does depend on the timing at Panel as it is important not to keep applicants and carers' waiting long, as this has been identified as an anxious time for them. It is important for the Panel Chair to manage a good balance between providing clear reasoning behind recommendations made and reducing the anxiety felt by Carers.

SECTION 6 – PANEL PROCESS

- 6.0.1 Each case begins with a discussion amongst Panel Members about areas they need further clarification on. The Chair compiles and allocates a list of questions from this, then will go out and meet the Carers and their Social Worker. Occasionally, the Social Worker(s) come in to Panel first to address any confidential or practice issues. Otherwise, it is general practice for Applicants/Foster Carers and their Social Worker to come in to Panel together and respond to questions between them. The Carers then leave Panel and the Social Worker remains whilst discussion takes place and a recommendation agreed. The Chair will then go out with the Social Worker to advise the Carers of the outcome whilst the Panel Adviser gathers together the feedback.
- 6.0.2 Although this process generally works well, there has been some discussion amongst Panel Chairs in the region about whether the Social Worker should remain in the room while the Panel Members discuss their views. Although it is important to work honestly and openly, it is also important that Panel Members feel able to share their views freely, even if those views conflict with those of the Social Worker.

SECTION 7 – QUALITY ASSURANCE

- 7.0.1 the Panel has independent oversight of all aspects of the Fostering service and has a responsibility to provide the Local Authority with feedback on the quality of the work undertaken. The processes by which this is done are currently under review. At present, a monitoring / feedback form is compiled after every case and sent by the Panel Adviser to the Social Worker after they attend Panel, with a copy to his/her manager for them to address any issues in supervision. This form covers the quality of the reports, the verbal presentation of the Social Worker and the preparation of their Applicants or Foster Carers. As yet, this information has not been pulled together in a way that enables Panel to identify any common areas of concern or particular practitioners about whom there are a number of issues raised, so this is an area for development moving forward. In addition, as more general practice issues are identified, the Panel Adviser is raising them with the Practice Manager. These are tracked in order to ensure the issues do not drift without action being taken, and to provide Panel with some indication of the outcomes. This tracking also gives Panel the ability to consider issues being repeatedly raised, or patterns of practice which may need to be addressed through training or more general awareness-raising. Feedback to Social Workers and their Managers covers a variety of issues including timescales, quality of assessments, health, training, policy and procedural issues.

- 7.0.2 These issues are all raised with the Practice Manager as well as individual Social Workers and/or their managers as appropriate. The tracking sheet records the progress of issues raised and outcomes reached. Moving forward, the tracking sheet will be amended to enable it to be a more accessible tool.
- 7.0.3 In addition, Social Workers and Applicants/Foster Carers are sent feedback forms with their invitation letter, asking them to complete it after Panel. The response rate for this form has been very poor, with only 36 out of 100 foster carers responding, and 4 out of 100 Social Workers, so going forward, the Panel Chair will be giving the form to both when updating them about the Panel recommendation, and asking them to spend five minutes completing it before they leave.
- 7.0.4 Feedback responses received are almost always positive. Comments from foster carers reflect a consistent view of Panel as being welcoming and friendly whilst remaining professional. Very few made suggestions for change, but from those that did, one felt it was not helpful to hold a Panel during the school holiday as Foster Carers then have to arrange child care or cut holidays short; one suggested she would like an idea of queries prior to attending; and one found parking difficult and the venue not well signed. One Foster Carer responded that she did not feel positive or appreciated after Panel and found the experience daunting. The Chair contacted this Foster Carer to explore her issues. Whilst she accepted that some of her comments reflected her anxiety rather than the behaviour of panel members, she also made suggestions about Panel's approach and the language used which were helpful and has been used to further develop the panel process.
- 7.0.5 Several of the Foster Carers expressed their thanks to their Social Workers on the form, so these are copied and sent to the Social Worker and Team Manager as well.
- 7.0.6 Of the four responses from Social Workers, three were positive and one expressed concern about the QA process prior to Panel.

SECTION 8 – APPRAISALS

- 8.0.1 All Panel Members, including the Chair, have an annual appraisal. For Panel Members these are undertaken by the Chair and Panel Adviser. Appraisals are organised where possible after Panels to limit the additional costs, but given recent Panels have taken full days, this has not been possible. At this stage, one annual appraisal is overdue as a result of extended Panels during the early months of this year. As this looks likely to continue for the foreseeable future, appraisals will have to be booked in on additional days.
- 8.0.2 Appraisals are the Panel member's opportunity to give and receive feedback about their role and about the functioning of the Panel generally. Any suggestions and ideas are welcomed as Panel is an ever-evolving process as legislation, guidance and good practice change. It is the appropriate time for any training needs to be identified, either because of a gap in the Panel member's skills or knowledge, or to develop a particular interest which can then be shared with the rest of Panel.

SECTION 9 – PANEL TRAINING

9.0.1 There has been one full day's training this year, attended by Panel Members and the Fostering team. This focussed on:

- The role of Panel in evaluating health and weight in substitute carers
- Good practice in the assessment of dogs and other pets of substitute carers
- The Impact of personal values and assumptions on the Panel process
- Life story work
- Permanent Fostering – New guidance and relating this to matching at Panel

Feedback from the training was that it was well received and thought to be helpful.

9.0.2 The possibility of half day bitesize training taking place when a Panel finishes at lunchtime has been discussed again this year but has not been possible, partly because of the high number of cases being presented to Panel, and partly because of the changes in Chair and Panel Adviser which has meant the focus has been on ensuring the core functions of the Panel are completed. Several of our Panel Members have skills in training, or a particular interest which other Members could learn from. It is an area for development, and going forward, the plan is to compile a list of those Panel Members willing to offer an hour or two to share their knowledge, when Panel has the space to do this. In addition, the Panel Adviser will be looking within the Local Authority for other staff who would be willing to share their experience with Panel. This could include:

- Emergency placements and expectations of foster carers – the reality of taking in a child out of office hours (EDT and/or an emergency foster carer)
- Keeping up to date with internet safety
- Evaluating safe caring policies
- Fostering in Practice (an experienced Foster Carer)

9.0.3 It is the intention of the Chair to draw up a list of areas Panel Members need additional training on in order to discuss with the Practice Manager and Panel Adviser.

9.0.4 Panel Members do have access to the online training programmes available to staff and carers but the Chair is not aware of whether anyone has accessed these.

9.0.5 The Chair has begun to attend the Fostering Network Panel Chair's forum, which has been found to be very helpful and will feedback issues and areas of discussion to Panel after each meeting. The first forum focussed some time discussing the process of Panels becoming paper-free, as well as consideration of the McKenzie ruling.

SECTION 10 – AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

10.0 Paper-free Panels

10.0.1 Most Fostering and Adoption Panels are in the process of becoming paper-free. This is currently being discussed for CBC. This is a positive progressive step, however it is essential that the hardware and software are both fit for purpose, and that all Panel Members have appropriate training and on-going technological support (including out of hours as most Panel Members read their papers outside of office hours).

10.1 Develop the Quality Assurance function of Panel

- 10.1.1 It is essential that Panel consults with the Practice Manager to clarify the level of monitoring required, and to ensure that any feedback provided by Panel is constructive in the further development of good practice within the Fostering Service. It is important to revisit the expectations of Ofsted, as well as all regulations, legislation, and guidance, to ensure that the Panel is seen as a 'Critical Friend' rather than an intrusive or collusive part of the process.

10.2 Amendment of the agenda

- 10.2.1 We have made minor adjustments to the Panel agenda in order to reduce duplication of information. However, when there are a high number of cases to be heard, the business items are inevitably not given sufficient attention. Further discussion will be had regarding whether it would be better to spend the first half an hour of Panel covering business items.

10.3 Monitoring of timescales

- 10.3.1 Since October 2015, we have not been monitoring whether timescales regarding completion of the Fostering assessment have been adhered to. This is an important part of the quality assurance role and will be monitored at future Panels and fed back to the Team and Practice Managers.

10.4 Panel member profiles

- 10.4.1 Further discussion will take place regarding whether it would be possible for all Panel Members to provide a profile with a photograph, and for these to be either sent to Applicants/Carers with their invitation letter, or provided to them as they arrive at panel. Alternatively, a photograph of panel could be taken and shown to applicants before they come in. These will need further consideration, as they would place additional burden on the already very busy administrators. Although feedback from Foster Carers has generally been positive, a high number are very anxious before they come in to the room, and to know who is in there and what their role is, may somewhat reduce that anxiety.

10.5 Management of volume of work at each Panel

- 10.5.1 It is important that the volume of work considered by panel is regularly monitored. CBC Panels have frequently been hearing six cases, which involves a significant amount of reading time as well as Panel time. It is important that panel members are able to give each case the time and attention required. However, it is also necessary to be mindful that the running of the panel needs to be efficient both in timescales and cost.

10.6 Continued efforts to ensure that Panel Members reflect the diversity of the community

- 10.6.1 As Panel Membership changes, focus on recruitment will continue to ensure that we have a variety of skills and backgrounds, and to ensure that our Panel includes people from a variety of ethnic heritages, from both genders and with experience of disabilities. Panel hope to recruit further Members who have been looked after as children by foster carers.

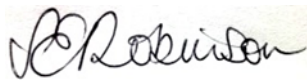
10.7 Further training opportunities

10.7.1 As discussed above, the Panel Chair and the Panel Adviser would like to develop the opportunities available to Panel Members to access a variety of training.

SECTION 11 - CONCLUSION

11.0.1 In conclusion, I would like to thank all Panel Members, the Panel Adviser and the Panel Administrators for their commitment to ensuring that the most vulnerable children in our care are provided with the highest quality foster care.

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



Suzannah Robinson
Chair of the Fostering and Permanence Panel

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

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Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Monday, 4 July 2016

Work Programme

Advising Officers:

Mel Peaston, Committee Services Manager
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Leslie Manning, Committee Services Officer
(leslie.manning@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is to assist the Corporate Parenting Panel in discharging its responsibilities by providing a proposed work programme for consideration.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Panel considers the proposed work programme attached at Appendix A.

1. To assist the Corporate Parenting Panel a work programme is attached at Appendix A to this report. The work programme contains the known agenda items that the Panel will need to consider.
2. Additional items will be identified as the municipal year progresses. The work programme is therefore subject to change.

Council Priorities

3. The activities of the Corporate Parenting Panel are crucial to ensuring that the Council effectively discharges its role as Corporate Parent of Looked After Children. By considering, approving and following its work programme the Panel helps support the Council's priorities of providing improving education and skills, protecting the vulnerable; improving wellbeing and being a more efficient and responsive Council.

Corporate Implications

Legal Implications

4. There are no legal implications.

Financial and Risk Implications

5. There are no financial and risk implications.

Equalities Implications

6. 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.
7. Report authors will be encouraged to work with the Corporate Policy Advisor (Equality & Diversity) in order to ensure that relevant equality implications are identified.

Conclusion and next Steps

8. This report will assist the Corporate Parenting Panel in discharging its responsibilities. Any amendments approved by the Panel will be incorporated in the work programme.

Appendices

The following Appendix is attached:

Appendix A – Corporate Parenting Panel Work Programme

Background Papers

None

Corporate Parenting Panel Work Programme

2015/16 Municipal Year		
9 May 2016		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placement Stability for Looked After Children (presentation) (EW) • Adoption Service Statement of Purpose 2016/17 • Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2016/17 (EW) • Securing Education, Employment and Training for LAC and Care Leavers (JD) • Work Programme (LM)
2016/17 Municipal Year		
4 July 2016		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2015/16 (SK) • Fostering Agency Q4 Performance Report (AC) • Fostering Agency Annual Report 2015/16 (AC) • Adoption Agency Annual Report 2015/16 (NP) • Work Programme (LM)
5 September 2016		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CiCC Presentation (MS) • LAC Annual (Health) Report (NHS – Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group) • Fostering Service Q1 Report (AC) • Corporate Parenting Annual Report (EW) • Work Programme (LM)
14 November 2016		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fostering Service Q2 Report (AC) • Adoption Agency Interim Report (NP) • Virtual School for LAC Interim Report (JE) • Work Programme (LM)
16 January 2017		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption Fund (NP) • Work Programme (LM)
6 March 2017		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CiCC and Participation Annual Report 2016/17 (MS/CiCC) • Fostering Service Q3 Report (AC) • Virtual School for LAC Interim Report (JE) • LAC Health Report – Six Monthly Update NHS Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (TMCD) • Work Programme (LM)
8 May 2017		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose, Fostering Agency Statement of Purpose (EW) • Corporate Parenting Action Plan – Annual Review (EW) • Work Programme (LM)

Unscheduled reports:

- Options for the funding of long term family care (GJ)

Appendix A

- Challenges experienced with the adoption process – discussion with carers (GJ)
- The appointment of a lay member/parent and the appointment of a substitute elected Member to the Joint Adoption Panel (author to be determined)
- Video presentation on the work of the CiCC (GJ)
- Foster care leavers be invited to attend and describe their experiences in care and raise any issues (GJ)
- Looked After Children's Health Care Provision 'Deep Dive' Report (by March 2016) (GJ)
- 'Spotlight Report' on the current process which applies to young people as they move into adult social care and what additional action can be taken to improve support for them during this phase (young people to be invited to attend and talk about their experiences) (GJ)
- 'Spotlight Report' on how the adoption process works and how people become adopters (GJ)
- 'Spotlight Reports' on the following issues:
 - a. LAC with disabilities
 - b. Unaccompanied asylum seekers as LAC
 - c. The Virtual School
 - d. The reason for, and the impact of, the movement of LAC between different foster carers (authors to be determined)
- A report by the foster carer representatives (Central Bedfordshire branch of the FCA) setting out feedback on various issues of their choice
- Corporate Apprenticeship Scheme and LAC (EW)
- 'Spotlight Report' providing examples of young people in different types of accommodation situations and what their experiences and outcomes were (18.01.16)
- Statistical information be provided on the number of young people, how they move on and what type of housing offers they receive (18.01.16)
- Given the perceived demand for foyer type accommodation, information be supplied on what is currently available within Central Bedfordshire and what the aspiration is for future provision (18.01.16)
- The impact of the government's policies towards the adoption process, including the changes to the family court system (18.01.16)
- Proposal on how to co-ordinate information relating to the Council's role as corporate parent (18.01.16)
- Accuracy of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (EW) (14.03.16)
- Academic progress made by children since becoming Looked After (14.03.16)
- Personal Advisor to attend Panel to explain measures taken to raise LAC expectations (JE) (14.03.16)

Appendix A

- Regular Update reports on the establishment of a regional adoption agency (GJ) (09.05.16)
- 'Spotlight Report' on youth support and help for adolescents in gaining further education, apprenticeships or employment (GJ) (09.05.16)

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