

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Room 15 - Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford, SG17 5TQ on Monday, 5 March 2018

PRESENT

Elected Members (voting)

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

Officers (voting)

Mrs J Ogley, Director, Social Care Health and Housing

Apologies for Absence: Mr P Albon
Mrs J Edwards, The Virtual School
Ms S Rymell, Head of Service - Intake & Family Support,
Access and Assessment

Members in Attendance: Cllr R D Berry

Officers in Attendance:	Ms R Coals	Principal Social Worker and Head of Professional Standards
	Mr A Coman	Head of Corporate Parenting
	Mr N Costin	Head of Housing Service
	Ms S Griffin	Committee Services Officer
	Mrs S Harvey	Consultant Social Worker
	Mr G Jones	Deputy Director Safeguarding and Early Help
	Ms K Mathu	CYP Participation Officer
	Mrs J Ogley	Director of Social Care, Health and Housing
	Miss N Phillips	Practice Manager Adoption

CPP/17/38. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 15 January 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendments to the meeting attendance:

- Duplicate record of Cllr Dodwell's attendance to be deleted
- Councillor Mrs S Goodchild and Councillor S Dixon to be added
- Councillor Mrs T Stock to be added to the apologies received

CPP/17/39. **Members' Interest**

Councillor Mrs A L Dodwell declared an interest as a member of the Council's Fostering Panel.

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

CPP/17/40. **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The following announcements and communications were made:

In response to the query raised about webcasting Corporate Parenting Panel, meetings, the Chairman advised that the general consensus was that meetings should not be webcast due to the sensitivity and nature of discussions that took place.

Councillor Stock explained to the Panel that she had attended a Corporate Parenting Open Day on the 31 January 2018 following which she had accompanied a Personal Adviser on a visit to two young people who were currently being supported by the local authority. The visits highlighted the vital role of the Personal Adviser. The Head of Corporate Parenting said that the opportunity of other members visiting with a Personal Advisor could be explored.

In response to a question raised about Disclosure Barring Service (DBS) checks, the Principal Social Worker and Head of Professional Standards explained DBS checks were a requirement for continuous engagement with children and that there was not the requirement for checks for one off accompanied visits.

The Panel was advised that Mr Jones, Deputy Director Safeguarding and Early Help would be leaving Central Bedfordshire Council to take up the role of Director of Children's Services at Leicester City Council. In response, the Vice Chairman and Members of the Panel expressed their thanks to the Deputy Director for his hard work and dedication on behalf of Children's Services and for his contribution to Corporate Parenting Panel and wished him every success in his new appointment.

In the absence of the Children In Care Council Representative, the Children and Young People Participation Officer gave an update on work that had been undertaken.

Points and comments included:

- The first Children In Care Council meeting had taken place in January and went well. A lot of suggestions were made for future topics of discussion and activities. Discussions also took place about what areas were working well (working with Ofsted, presenting to others, being involved in the interview process and the Awards Ceremony) and ways to resolve issues such as not being able to contact a Personal Assistant. Feedback given at the meeting included praise for social workers and CiCC mentors and that the young people felt their opinions were valued.
- A WhatsApp group had been created as another avenue of communication. This had generated a lot of conversation and provided the opportunity to share opinions and views of other young people.
- Representatives from the CiCC had visited Luton Fire Station to learn about fire safety which was of social and educational value. One young person had subsequently expressed an interest in becoming a fire cadet.
- Future plans this term included continued working with the charity Frontline to provide training for social work students. A regional induction event was taking place on the 17 March with 90 social work students expected.
- CiCC representatives were also attending Warwick University in September to present to 300 students.

CPP/17/41. **Amendment to Terms of Reference for the Corporate Parenting Panel**

The Panel considered the report outlining the proposed amendment to the Terms of Reference to allow either the Executive Member or the Deputy Executive Member for Families, Education and Children to be the Chairman of the Panel.

Points and comments included:

- The Executive Member for Families, Education and Children explained that he would still attend Panel meetings in the capacity of Chairman but the Vice-Chair would take the role as Chairman.
- The proposed amendment provides continuity and flexibility and would not diminish the work taking place and value of the Panel.
- Should the Chairman of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee be a member of the Corporate Parenting Panel to ensure that there is oversight and scrutiny of the items being considered.

- Concern was expressed that the proposed amendment to the Terms of Reference was not in keeping with the principle that the Executive Member for Families, Education and Children would be Chairman of the Panel.

RESOLVED

- 1. that the proposed changes to the Terms of Reference be deferred to the April meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel.**
- 2. that the view of the Director of Children's Services would be sought on the proposed changes to the Terms of Reference.**

CPP/17/42. Meeting the housing and support needs of vulnerable young people

The Panel considered a report providing an update on meeting the housing and support needs of vulnerable young people.

Points and comments included:

1. Operational collaboration had improved greatly since 2014 and a cultural shift in how departments worked together had resulted in a greater understanding of Corporate Parenting (Panel) responsibilities by housing colleagues. Improving access to social housing had been a key success since 2014.
2. The Head of Service, Social Care Health & Housing explained that new duties of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 included care leavers living in another local authority area who were at college or university and fell into difficulty with housing now having the choice of which local authority they were able to approach for support.
3. The Act also included the duty on statutory agencies such as social care providers to refer service users that may be homeless or threatened with homelessness to a local housing authority and the requirement for a personalised housing plan.
4. A requirement of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 was the development of a Leaving Care offer. A key target was the completion of the first draft in May 2018, and for the final document to be published in October 2018.
5. The guidance for local authorities on the local offer for care leavers had been published at the end of February 2018. Further detail of the offer was awaited.
6. The Head of Corporate Parenting advised that from April 2018 (through the Children and Social Work Act 2017), the new duty of the offer of Personal Adviser support was being extended to all care leavers to the age of 25 regardless of whether they were in education would come into effect. The support would also apply retrospectively to carer leavers who had previously ceased receiving support when they reached age 21.

7. Members of the Panel were advised that eligibility criteria was in place for the provision of accommodation for Care Leavers.
8. Next steps included Central Bedfordshire Council Housing being the main provider of supported shared housing for care leavers with the majority of the housing being from Central Bedfordshire Council stock.
9. The Head of Corporate Parenting explained that depending on the age of the Care leaver, various entitlements, grants and allowances were available from the Government to help with utility expenses such as electricity and water bills.
10. The Head of Corporate Parenting advised that an assessment of need was carried out for all unaccompanied young asylum seekers in order to gain an understanding of language and culture requirements. A pathway plan was then produced setting out the services required which was specific to each young person.
11. Support was available until a care leaver felt they were ready to move into independent living. Personal Assistants were key to the provision of support for the transition to adulthood and independent living. The possibility of supporting those with acute need from 25 years to 30 years of age where appropriate was being discussed. The support would be offered on a case by case basis.
12. In terms of those young people barred from the housing register, the key was to work with colleagues in Housing to prevent young people getting to the point where they could not access housing.

NOTED

- 1. the progress made since January 2016 towards an improved day to day experience of housing and support services by Care Leavers, and towards improved access to supported accommodation for those Care Leavers that are not ready for independent accommodation at the age of 18;**
- 2. the experiences and challenges of Care Leavers towards achieving suitable housing solutions;**
- 3. the proposed next steps and works in progress;**
- 4. the related developments in this area;**
- 5. the new responsibilities of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and how this would influence the development of the Leaving Care Offer.**

RESOLVED

- 1. that an update on the implications of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, Children and Social Work Act 2017 and Leaving Care Offer would be given at the July meeting of the Panel.**
- 2. that a Care Leaver would be invited to attend a future meeting of the Panel to give their experience of the process.**

CPP/17/43. **Becoming an Adopter**

The Panel considered the report of the Director of Children's Services which provided an update on the pathway for becoming an adopter.

The Chairman welcomed an adoptive parent to the meeting who shared her own experience of the adoption process.

Points and comments included:

- The longest waiting period of the process was waiting for the Panel and for adopters who had been matched.
- The expectation of the length of the adoption process needed to be managed as the process can take 18 – 24 months not the 6 months advised.
- It would be helpful for the adoption booklet to explain how the court process worked and to make adoptive parents aware that the birth parents are able to contest the adoption until the court day.
- The value of having a psychologist to support the adoptive parents during the process needed to be considered.

NOTED

the report on Becoming an Adopter.

CPP/17/44. **Spotlight Report on the Walking Alongside You (WAY) project**

The Panel considered a report outlining the progress on the Walking Alongside You (WAY) project.

Points and comments included:

- It was planned that the initial cohort would be of 20 women who had children removed from their care, supported by two WAY workers.
- Following the initial scoping of the issue in Central Bedfordshire to analyse the current caseload in Court and Permanency Teams, five women had been identified who were going through court proceedings or had children

who had been removed from their care had agreed to be part of the project which would last up to 18 months.

- The WAY project could include teenage pregnancy as it did not have an age limit.
- Next steps included ensuring that the appropriate training had taken place for WAY workers and those involved with the project.

NOTED

the content of the report be noted.

RESOLVED

that a progress update would be given one year after implementation of the Project (May/June 2019).

CPP/17/45. **Short term placement stability**

The Panel received a presentation outlining the number of children who had experienced 3 or more placement moves in the past 12 months.

Points and comments included:

1. There is a nationally defined indicator to measure the percentage of Looked After Children who experienced three or more placement moves in the period of 12 month.
2. At the end of January 2018 the data for Central Bedfordshire showed that 6.6% (21 children) had three or more placement moves over the previous 12 months with two children having five or less moves.
3. The performance for Central Bedfordshire was very strong in both short term and long term placement stability and the authority was currently outperforming against target.
4. More work needed to take place around placement moves for adolescents.

NOTED

the contents of the presentation and addendum on Short Term Placement stability

RESOLVED

that benchmarking against other local authorities would be added to future reports to evidence performance and achievements.

CPP/17/46. **Agency Report Quarter 3 – Fostering 1 October – 31 December 2017**

The Panel considered a report outlining the activity in the Fostering Service from 1 October to 31 December 2017.

Points and comments included:

- The Fostering Service was advertised in various ways such as social media, press coverage of events, bulletins, newsletters and advertisements. Discussions took place with the Communications team on a regular basis to review ways of communication and the promotion of the Service.
- Suggestions on raising awareness of the Fostering Service in the community and expanding the diversity of foster carers were welcomed such as ward surgeries held by Councillors.
- The aging population of foster carers was both a national and local issue. Greater focus was needed on the recruitment of younger foster carers.
- The geographical areas in Central Bedfordshire where foster carers were required had been identified and targeted recruitment would take place.

NOTED

the Fostering Agency Quarter 3 Report.

RESOLVED

that Mr P Fraser, Partnership and Community Engagement be contacted regarding the promotion of the Fostering Service through town and parish council networks.

CPP/17/47. **Work Programme**

Members considered the report of the Committee Services Officer which set out the Panel's proposed work programme for part of the municipal year 2017/18.

RESOLVED

that the Corporate Parenting Panel work programme, as attached at Appendix A to the report of the Committee Services Offices, be approved subject to the addition of the following updates:

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.50 p.m.)