

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

**This meeting  
may be filmed.\***



**Central  
Bedfordshire**

**please ask for** Sharon Griffin  
**direct line** 0300 300 5066  
**date** 15 October 2018

## **NOTICE OF MEETING**

### **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL**

Date & Time

**Thursday, 25 October 2018 10.00 a.m.**

Venue at

**Room 14 - Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford, SG17 5TQ**

Richard Carr  
**Chief Executive**

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

#### **Elected Members (voting)**

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

[Named Substitutes:

Cllrs R D Berry, D Bowater, Mrs D B Gurney, G Perham, 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)

Assistant Director Leisure, Libraries and Countryside (or their representative if the Assistant Director 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.

#### **Children in Care Council representative (Co-Chairman) (non-voting)**

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**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 the 30 April 2018 and 26 July 2018 (copies attached).

3. **Members' Interest**

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

<b>Item</b>	<b>Subject</b>
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5	<b>Independent Reviewing Officers' Annual Report 2017 - 2018</b>
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To consider the Independent Reviewing Officers' (IRO) Annual Report April 2017-2018.

6	<b>Looked After Children Social Worker Stability</b>
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To consider a report on social work stability for Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire.

7	<b>Foster Carers Loans Policy</b>
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To consider the policy for the provision of an interest-free loan to fostering households, who wish to extend or convert their homes in order to offer a wider range or number of placements to CBC children in care.

8	<b>Fostering Quarter 1 Report</b>
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To consider the Fostering Panel Quarter 1 report outlining the activities in the Fostering Service for the period of 1 April to 30 June 2018.

9	<b>Regional Adoption Agency</b>
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To receive an update on the Regional Adoption Agency

10	<b>Personal Advisor and financial support offered to young people leaving</b>
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## **care**

To consider a report outlining the support available to young people leaving care in Central Bedfordshire, alongside a new approach to managing this support and introduction of Council Tax exemption for this cohort (**to follow**)

## 11 **Work Programme**

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, SG17 5TQ on Monday, 30 April 2018

**PRESENT**

**Elected Members (voting)**

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

**Officers (voting)**

Mrs S Harrison, Director of Children's Services  
Mrs J Ogle, Director of Social Care, Health and Housing

**Carers (non-voting)**

Mr P Albon

Members in Attendance: Cllrs R D Berry  
K Ferguson

Officers in Attendance:	Ms R Coals	– Principal Social Worker and Head of Professional Standards
	Mr A Coman	– Head of Corporate Parenting
	Ms A Craig	– Practice Manager Fostering
	Mrs J Edwards	– Head of Virtual School
	Mr L Manning	– Committee Services Officer
	Ms K Mathu	– CYP Participation Officer
	Miss N Phillips	– Practice Manager Adoption
	Ms S Rymell	– Assistant Director of Safeguarding and Early Help
Others in Attendance:	Ambassador	– For Children in Care Council

**CPP/17/48. Minutes****RESOLVED**

**that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 5 March 2018 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the following amendment:**

**Minute CPP/17/39 (Members' Interests)**

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

**CPP/17/49. Members' Interests**

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

**CPP/17/50. Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The following announcements and communications were made:

- The Chairman sought the views of the Committee on whether the Chairman of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be permitted to sit as a member of the Panel. Whilst some Members supported this suggestion the Director of Children's Services stated that it could be difficult for effective scrutiny of an issue to take place if the Member had helped to formulate it. She emphasised the need to be fully aware of boundaries and suggested that, as an alternative, the Member be appointed as an 'observer' instead. Whilst some Members concurred with the Director's suggestion others felt that the presence of the Overview and Scrutiny Chairman would be helpful, especially as some of the reports considered by the Panel were not submitted to the Committee. Following further comment the Director suggested that the Chairman of the Panel present a regular short update to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, thereby raising awareness of issues. In response the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee explained that the Committee had no wish to receive items simply to note and would only wish to consider those items that it could have an input into. If any reports were forwarded from the Panel to the Committee it would be because a decision was required. Given the views expressed the Chairman of the Panel stated that the current arrangements would continue but further discussion would take place.
- The Chairman thanked the Children in Care Council (CiCC) representative for attending and being available to provide her opinion.
- A Member asked for information on the current number of Looked After Children in comparison to past numbers be submitted to future meetings of the Panel. It was agreed that this would be a standing item on future

agendas and cover issues such as turnover and outcomes (parents, adopted, fostered, family guardianship).

**CPP/17/51. Amendment to the Terms of Reference for the Corporate Parenting Panel**

The Panel considered a report which set out a request to amend the Panel's Terms of Reference to allow either the Executive Member for Families, Education and Children (the current Chairman) or the Deputy Executive Member (the current Vice-Chairman) to chair the Panel's meetings even when the Executive Member was present.

Points and comments included:

- The Chairman stressed that the reason for the proposed change was because he wished to make greater use of the Vice-Chairman/Deputy Executive Member's skills and experience. Doing so would create greater resilience, allow him to focus on other issues and compliment his management style. He added that he had raised the proposal with the Independent Chairman of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board who had raised no objection. The Director of Children's Services stated that the Panel was strong and, as long as the Executive Member attended its meetings on a regular basis and the Panel was working as it should, there was unlikely to be an objection from Ofsted.
- The possibility of co-chairing the meeting with a CiCC representative was raised and discussion took place on the dates and times on which the Panel's future meetings should be held to enable and encourage young people to attend. The Director of Children's Services suggested they should take place after 4.00 p.m. or during half term. The Vice-Chairman welcomed the suggestion and indicated that times could be flexible. Whilst some Members welcomed the proposals there was also some dissatisfaction at the lack of consultation amongst the Panel and the possible wider implications.
- The CiCC representative had no comment on the proposal.

**RESOLVED**

- 1 that the General Purposes Committee be requested to consider and approve an amendment of the Corporate Parenting Panel's Terms of Reference to allow the Deputy Executive Member for Families, Education and Children to chair the meetings of the Panel even when the Executive Member for Families, Education and Children was present;**
- 2 that the General Purposes Committee be requested to consider and approve an amendment of the Corporate Parenting Panel's Terms of Reference to allow a representative from the Children in Care Council to co-chair the meetings of the Corporate Parenting Panel;**

**3 that the Children in Care Council determine which of its members is able to act as co-chair.**

(Note: It was subsequently established that amendments to the Corporate Parenting Panel's Terms of Reference could be authorised by the Monitoring Officer, after consultation with the Executive Member for Families, Education and Children and the Director of Children's Services where these have been recommended by the Panel itself (minute E/09/190 of the Executive held on 9 March 2010 refers).

**CPP/17/52. Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose 2018/19**

The Panel considered the draft Adoption Service Statement of Purpose for 2018/19.

Points and comments included:

- In response to a Member's query the Practice Manager Adoption stated that Parts 9 and 10 of the draft Statement ('Preparation and Assessment' and 'Procedure for Assessment' respectively) remained unchanged and a two stage adopter recruitment and approval process continued.
- A Member drew the Panel's attention to a number of errors in the draft document. The Chairman asked that any amendments be passed to the Practice Manager Adoption.
- Some Members sought clarification regarding the officer structure for corporate parenting following recent changes. The Panel was advised that this information was included in the Member Information Bulletin but a Member commented that it would not be seen by the foster carers or Children in Care Council. However, a foster carer stated that carers were updated by the Director of Children's Services. The Chairman suggested that the officer structure be circulated separately (a copy is attached at Appendix A).
- In response to a Member query regarding the Later Life Letter, the Practice Manager Adoption explained that the Letter was written by the child's social worker and would be given to prospective adopters. It would then be passed to adolescents/early adults and provide information on why the child had been adopted. It was noted that, in addition, all children placed for adoption would have a Life Story Book completed within 10 days of the adoption hearing.
- Discussion took place on the content of paragraph 3.1 of the draft document and where the responsibility for the Adoption Service rested. The Chairman stated that the Practice Manager Adoption would clarify this matter.

- A Member reminded the Panel of the need to find a replacement for her to sit on the Adoption Panel. The Chairman undertook to raise this matter with the Conservative Group for consideration at the Council's Annual Meeting.

## **RESOLVED**

**that, subject to the correction of any errors and clarification outlined in the preamble above, the draft Adoption Service Statement of Purpose 2018/19 be approved and adopted.**

### **CPP/17/53. Fostering Agency Statement of Purpose 2018/19**

The Panel considered the draft Fostering Agency Statement of Purpose for 2018/19.

Points and comments included:

- The Practice Manager Fostering advised that there had been no major changes to the document. Links had been added and issues raised with regard to the previous statement had been considered.
- Reference was made by a Member to various errors in the draft document and the Member undertook to advise the Practice Manager Fostering of these.
- A Member queried if the foster carers' views had been sought and, if so, where they were recorded. In response the Head of Corporate Parenting stated that this information was included in Item 8 (Results of Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy) (minute CPP/17/54 below refers). He added that, besides the 'Talktime' meetings he held sessions ('Tea with Alex') with the carers every two months to exchange views and ideas and help develop the service. A foster carer stated that he would welcome the attendance of other Members at the above.

## **RESOLVED**

**that, subject to the correction of any errors, the draft Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2018/19 be approved and adopted.**

### **CPP/17/54. Results of Fostering Recruitment and Retention Survey**

The Panel considered a report setting out the results of the recent fostering recruitment and retention survey.

Points and comments included:

- With regard to possible methods of recruiting foster carers the Practice Manager Fostering stated that village fetes and radio advertisements

had been tried before and had not proved to be worthwhile. She added that she was open to any suggestions regarding improvements to the recruitment process.

- A Member referred to the survey undertaken by the Fostering Service of its in house foster carers which had focused on recruitment and retention. Whilst the 'headlines' from the survey were included in the officer report she stated that it would have been of use for the Panel to have seen the survey questions and, therefore, known the background. Another Member indicated her support for this and asked if carers had helped to draw it up. She also expressed her disappointment at the low response rate. The Chairman asked that the questions be circulated separately.
- A Member commented on the absence of a mentoring system to allow current foster carers to call on those who were previously carers for advice. One of the carers present indicated that his wife carried out a mentoring role whilst the Practice Manager Fostering advised that the Council did have a formal mentoring system.
- The Head of Corporate Parenting explained that 'Talktime' was a formal meeting with foster carers but the 'Tea with Alex' sessions were informal in nature. The latter had received positive feedback. A foster carer commented on the limited number of foster carers who attended the 'Talktime' meetings and other events and emphasised the need for others to become involved. The Practice Manager acknowledged this situation but added that many carers were very busy.
- A Member commented that some of the new communities arriving in Central Bedfordshire included families with various challenges and queried how the Council was responding. The Head of Corporate Parenting replied that the Council took full account of the need for ethnic and religious diversity amongst its carers. As an example, the Practice Manager Fostering referred to the work undertaken on the recruitment of Muslim carers.
- Mention was made of introducing 'cluster' meetings and of promoting fostering at school.

## **NOTED**

**the report on the results of the recent fostering recruitment and retention strategy.**

### CPP/17/55. **Work Programme**

Members considered a report setting out the Panel's proposed work programme. Deferring some items from consideration at the July meeting was discussed as was the possibility of arranging an additional meeting to deal with outstanding items.

Members considered in depth the challenges they faced in performing their role and how their effectiveness in meetings could be increased. They also expressed disappointment at the delay experienced between requesting that an item be submitted to the Panel and the delay before the report was actually submitted.

The Chairman stated that she would wish to see young people involved in helping to choose the report items.

### **RESOLVED**

**that the work programme, as attached at Appendix A of the report of the Committee Services Officer, be approved subject to the following:**

- **The outcome of consideration by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel on the prioritisation of the Panel's workload and any changes that could subsequently arise to the work programme.**
- **The submission of the report on Looked After Children social worker churn to the September meeting of the Panel.**
- **The introduction of a standing item comparing the current number of Looked After Children to past numbers and covering issues such as turnover and outcomes (parents, adopted, fostered, family guardianship).**

CPP/17/56. **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

### **RESOLVED**

**that in accordance with Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 2 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.**

CPP/17/57. **Final Report Virtual School for Looked After Children**

The Panel considered an exempt updated report for the Virtual School for Looked After Children which provided information on the role of the School and the validated outcomes at Key Stages 1, 2 and 4 for Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire in the Academic Year 2016/17. It also included data for the academic year 2017/18 and identified the steps being taken in partnership with other agencies including schools and social care to raise the achievement and progress of all Looked After Children.

Points and comments included:

- The Head of Service, Virtual School and Vulnerable Pupils introduced the report and highlighted various points for Members’ notice.
- The Head of Service advised the meeting that there was an open invitation to Members to attend a Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting and those interested should contact her.
- The Head of Service stated that Key Stage 4 progress was poor. Information on this would be circulated separately.
- The Head of Service stated that, in her next report to the Panel, she would set out details as to the current situation regarding the education of vulnerable children. She stated that this would be based on information supplied by the schools themselves.
- With regard to the fall in Looked After Children attendance at Key Stage 4 the Head of Service explained that this was a reflection of an issue that arose nationally with the age range 15-16 as some young people stopped fully engaging academically and choose to focus on other interests. It was also sometimes difficult for foster carers to assert control. The Head of Service stressed, however, that schemes were available to help achieve positive outcomes.

**NOTED**

**the exempt updated final report Virtual School for Looked After Children for the Academic Year 2016/17.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.11 p.m.)

Chairman.....

Dated.....

## CORPORATE PARENTING SERVICE – STRUCTURE CHART –OCTOBER 2018

<b>Managers Reporting to Alex Coman</b> (Sheryl Mallinson - PA)					
Nigel Stock Practice Manager Corporate Parenting	Ann Bolland	Sharon Hinds	Sarah Malivoire	Annie Craig Practice Manager Fostering	Nickie Phillips Practice Manager Adoption
Jayne Foster Micky Pompa Hannah Miles				Jackie Walsh Emma Thurlow- Pick Linda Day Jenny Howard	Gisele Farmer

CORPORATE PARENTING SERVICE – STRUCTURE CHART –OCTOBER 2018

<b>Managers Reporting to Annie Craig – Fostering</b>			
Jackie Walsh	Emma Thurlow Pick	Linda Day	Jenny Howard
Claire Gaunt-Warner Gemma Webb Liz Brian Nicola Sylvester Aetheria Henry Gill Robinson	Sue Deans Noeline Hutchinson Jessica Buck Matthew Canavan Jade Draper Charlotte Morgan Helen Falkner	Mechelle Mead Julia Barnwell	Victoria Ash

CORPORATE PARENTING SERVICE – STRUCTURE CHART –OCTOBER 2018

<b>Managers Reporting to Alex Coman – Adoption</b>
Nickie Phillips
Sarah O’Connor Laura Bonadies Peter Wilson Sophie Armagon Lisa Breach Anne Devine Penny Wilson Jack Webb

CORPORATE PARENTING SERVICE – STRUCTURE CHART –OCTOBER 2018

<b>Managers Reporting to Alex Coman – Court and Permanency Teams</b>		
<b>Ann Bolland</b>	<b>Sarah Malvoire</b>	<b>Sharon Hinds</b>
<p align="center">Ebenezer Puplampu Katie Lee Satvinder Matoo Rachel Liburd Limor Lancaster Bob Church</p>	<p align="center">Kirtie Baughan Sarah Hall Leigh Butler Anna Styles Fameda Kuddus Herbert Nyika Khundai Chenjerai</p>	<p align="center">Simon Bullen Mim Gale Beverley Sorenson Ghuzala Kausar Anna McCall Emma Hersey</p>

CORPORATE PARENTING SERVICE – STRUCTURE CHART –OCTOBER 2018

<b>Managers Reporting to Alex Coman – Nigel Stock</b> (Business Support – Margaret Newbery)		
Jayne Foster	Hannah Miles	Micky Pompa
Joe Price Sinead Collins Jo Storton Kelly Arnold Sharon Hewitt Lucie Jones Peter Ball	Kirenpreet Sidhu Wellington Gubwe Keshavardhan Jalagari Claire Seamarks Gina Brown Gavin Blackman Danielle Redman Claire Mountney	Sue Waller Rachel Keane Sam Gavin Tracey Fenn Susan Ibrahim Sandeep Sehmbi

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**CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL**

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at The Rufus Centre, Steppingley Rd, Flitwick, MK45 1AH on Thursday, 26 July 2018

**PRESENT**

**Elected Members (voting)**

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

**Officers (voting)**

Mrs S Harrison Director of Children's Services  
Mrs J Ogley Director of Social Care, Health and Housing

**Carers (non-voting)**

Mr P Albon

**Children in Care Representative (Co-Chairman) (non-voting)**

Children in Care Council Representative

Officers in Attendance:	Ms R Coals	Principal Social Worker and Head of Professional Standards
	Mr A Coman	Head of Corporate Parenting
	Ms A Craig	Practice Manager, Fostering
	Ms S Griffin	Committee Services Officer
	Ms J Howard	Marketing, Recruitment and Training Officer
	Ms K Mathu	CYP Participation Officer
	Miss N Phillips	Practice Manager Adoption
	Ms S Rymell	Assistant Director of Safeguarding and Early Help

Others in Attendance: Press  
5 Children in Care Council Representatives

**CPP/17/1. Minutes**

It was noted that the minutes of the meeting held on the 30 April 2018 were not available for approval.

**CPP/17/2. Members' Interest**

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

**CPP/17/3. Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The following announcements and communications were made:

- The Chairman introduced a young person from the Children in Care Council and explained that the young person would be assisting with the chairing of the meeting.
- The Chairman advised that further to discussions at the April meeting about a Children in Care Council Representative (CiCC) co-chairing CPP meetings, the Terms of Reference for the Panel needed to be amended to reflect this change, taking into account the following resolution at Executive in March 2010:

‘that the Monitoring Officer, after consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services and the Director for Children’s Services, be authorised to approve future amendments to the Terms of Reference of the Corporate Parenting Panel where these have been recommended by the Panel itself’.

- The Panel were advised that alternative meeting dates were being identified to coincide with school holidays which would allow CiCC representatives to attend further meetings of the Panel. Outlook meeting requests would be sent to Members when the dates had been confirmed.
- The Chairman expressed her thanks to all those involved in the Children in Care Council (CiCC) Summer Ball and Awards Night on 20th July and for the contribution made by both Members and officers. The evening was well attended and had been a great success.

**RESOLVED**

**that the Terms of Reference for the Corporate Parenting Panel be amended to reflect that a Children in Care Council Representative would co-chair future meetings.**

**CPP/17/4. Exclusion of Press and Public****RESOLVED**

**That in accordance with Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.**

**CPP/17/5. Children In Care Council and Participation 2017-2018 Annual Report**

The Panel considered the Children in Care Council's Annual Report for the period of 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018 in conjunction with the exempt presentation which included a summary of the work of the CiCC and Participation Officer, CiCC Achievements in influencing change, challenges, and future priorities over this period.

Points and comments on the Report included:

- The CiCC continued to be involved in addressing policy decisions, contributing to consultations, support with recruitment and training, undertaking presentations at various forums and being given the opportunity to influence change.
- The CiCC is a diverse group of 24 core group members and their ages ranged from 11 to 25.
- The CiCC gives young people in care the opportunity to have a voice and be listened. A common factor is their experiences of being in care and their determination and commitment to make improvements. They also know that they are being listened to and that their work makes a real difference.
- CiCC members have been involved in the Ofsted single inspection of Central Bedfordshire Council where they were asked questions about their work and the support they are offered.
- The CiCC Participation Officer relaunched the 'Aspiration's Wish List'. Members of the Panel were asked for their support in providing opportunities for work experience within the community in line with the young people's aspirations.
- The Director of Children's Services suggested that as some councillors were school governors, one possible area of work could be to compile a list alongside the young people of 10 top tips on how to be a good school governor to give an understanding of what could be done better to support young people in care in the education setting.

- With regard to increasing the profile of the CiCC, an area of consideration could be to give a presentation at Governor and Teacher seminars.
- The CiCC Participation Officer detailed the various ways in which the young people's feedback is gathered as explained in her report.
- The view of young people and their Foster Carers about ways of keeping records of important events in their lives and significant objects in the form of a Memory Box or Life Story work were welcomed.
- The Foster Carer representative explained that babies were sometimes given their hospital wrist bans or were provided with a toy by hospital staff which was then put into a memory box. Photos of life experiences are also collected alongside any other physical or digital memories which are staying with the child
- One of the CiCC young person explained that discussions are taking place regarding ways in which the voice of other young people for whom English is not their first language can be heard even more. It was acknowledged that the young people will find it more difficult to explain what their views are when English is not their first language.
- The Head of Corporate Parenting explained that one of the central points of working with young people was to listen to their voices to ensure their views were incorporated in the care plans and support provided.
- A member of the Panel asked if future reports could include examples of how CiCC had helped other children and a brief outline of how this had been achieved.
- Clarification was sought on the number of CiCC representatives requiring additional support and what arrangements were in place to ensure that their needs were being met.
- The Head of Corporate Parenting thanked Foster Carers for the care they provided in opening their homes to children and young people, for listening to their wishes and providing support as having the young people as part of their family.

The Chairman thanked the CiCC Ambassadors for the very detailed report and for the work they had undertaken.

#### **NOTED**

**the Children in Care Council's Annual Report 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018 and the accompanying exempt presentation.**

**(Note:**

- 1. Minute CPP/17/12 below also refers.**
- 2. At the conclusion of this item the Panel moved into public session)**

**CPP/17/6. Children in Care Council Presentation**

The Panel received a presentation on the work that had been undertaken by the Children in Care Council during the year.

Note: Minute CPP/17/5 above also refers.

**CPP/17/7. Impact of New Legislation on Young People Leaving Care**

The Panel considered a report of the Executive Member for Families, Education and Children on the impact of the new legislation introduced by the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and the support provided to the young people leaving care in Central Bedfordshire.

The Director of Children's Services explained that the wording of recommendations 2 and 3 in the report needed to be amended as the recommendations were not within the remit of the Corporate Parenting Panel. The recommendations would be referred to the Corporate Resources OSC and the Executive.

Points and comments included:

- The Director of Children's Services explained that the two key areas in the report were the exemption from council tax for Care Leavers in Central Bedfordshire and the duty of the local authority to assist Care Leavers in, or preparing for, adulthood and independent living up to the age of 25 in accordance with new legislation introduced by the Children and Social Work Act 2017.
- The purpose of the report was to outline the holistic thinking around the support offered to young people leaving care in Central Bedfordshire and the need for a bespoke solution for each young person.
- Key message from care leavers included concern about becoming 18 and not having any support available.
- Members of the Panel were advised that the possibility of offering incentives to reward young people for their work at school or college was being explored.
- Central Bedfordshire Council currently offered Bikeability cycle training courses to equip young people with practical skills and understanding about cycling on roads.
- Central Bedfordshire Council's Care Leavers offer includes educating young people about how to budget in addition to how to access support about

debt management problems and to provide support for the process of applying for a passport,

- A member of the Panel said it was important for young people to have access to Wi-Fi technology and suggested that potentially a mobile phone company could be approached for this provision. It was acknowledged that this may be difficult as everyone has their preference in terms of how they access internet and which provider they use.
- Members of the Panel needed to be mindful of the costs outlined in the report of a yearly reduction of council's income of between £30k and £40k resulting from introduction of the Council Tax exemption and the total cost of £57k per year to increase the Leaving Care establishment from 7 Personal Advisers to 9.
- The Director of Social Care, Health and Housing reiterated that it was important that the implications of the implementation of the exemption from council tax for Care Leavers in Central Bedfordshire were understood and that each case should be looked at on an individual basis.
- Members of the Panel agreed that the figures given in the report and the financial implications needed to be explored in greater detail and asked that further costings be undertaken.

## **RESOLVED**

- 1. that the impact of the new legislation be noted.**
- 2. that the proposed solution and financial implication in addressing the impact of the new legislation by increased the Leaving Care establishment from 7 Personal Advisers to 9 with a total cost of £57k/year be supported in principle subject to further costings being explored in greater detail and reported at the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel to enable the Panel to finalise the recommendations to Corporate Resources OSC and the Executive.**
- 3. that the implementation of Council Tax exemption (when appropriate) for Central Bedfordshire Council's Care leavers up to the age of 25 living within Central Bedfordshire Council's borders be explored in greater detail and further costings reported at the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel to enable the Panel to finalise the recommendations to Corporate Resources OSC and the Executive.**

### **CPP/17/8. Fostering Team Annual Report 2017-18**

The Panel considered a report of the Director of Children's Services on the 2017/18 Annual Report for the Fostering Team. A copy of the report was attached at Appendix 1 to the Director of Children's Services report and a copy of the Foster Carers Charter was attached at Appendix 2.

Points and comments included:

- The Fostering Practice Manager explained that the number of occasions on which a children was admitted into the care of the Local Authority remained similar to that of the previous year (131 occasions compared with 132 in the previous year).
- 20 of the young people placed during the last year with in-house foster carers, Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) or in semi-independent living were unaccompanied asylum seekers (compared to 44 in the previous year).
- In this financial year the highest percentage of the children accommodated during the year were aged between 0 to 4 years of age in comparison to the previous financial year (2016/17) where the highest percentage of children accommodated were in the 16+ age category.
- The placement of siblings continued to be an area of challenge due to the lack of bedroom space.
- At the end of March 2018 the Service had exceeded the target of 8.5% set for this financial year (currently at 7.1%) in relation to the percentage of Looked After Children with 3 or more placement moves during the year.
- In response to the concerns raised about number of short term placement moves, the Head of Corporate Parenting explained that in some cases the placement moves are only changes in legal status not physical moves of addresses.
- The national concern about the ageing population of foster carers and that 10/15% due to retire in next 5 years continued. The average age of CBC carer is between 40-54, youngest being 23, oldest being 76. Research completed by CBC fostering service indicated that this was not currently an area for concern.
- There continued to be a year on year increase in the number of requests for Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs). The main support requested was in relation to contact followed by therapy for the children.
- A celebration of 50 years of took place in June and 3 fostering households were successfully nominated in the year and would be attending 1 of the Queen's Garden Parties during 2018.
- The new initiative 'Tea with Alex' gave foster carers the opportunity to meet with the Head of Corporate Parenting on a regular basis to help shape the service.
- The number of allegations against foster carers /Ofsted notifications remained low and no new complaints made about the Fostering Service. Compliments.

- The Service received 7 compliments during the year on a range of different issues. The Fostering Service also received very positive feedback from Ofsted inspection.
- A number of different schemes had been developed including the Supported Lodging Scheme, a Parent and Child Fostering Scheme and PACE Fostering Scheme.
- The Service had taken over some responsibility for assessing and supporting Private Foster Carers.
- Future work for the Service included:
  - the recruitment of more foster carers
  - the introduction a loan scheme for foster carers to enable them to extend/adapt their property in order to care for siblings groups
  - looking into a Support Care Scheme which is a preventative strategy to support children on the edge of care

Members were advised that Central Bedfordshire Council introduced a Foster Carers Charter in 2011, but this had now been reviewed in light of updates from the Fostering Network. The Charter sets out the Fostering Services and foster carers roles and expectations and commitments to each other.

The Fostering Practice Manager will be exploring the reason for the increase in the provision of regular respite placements from 50 occasions in the previous year to 102 this year.

Members of the Panel were advised that information provided in the annual report was in accordance with statutory guidance but data on Social Worker stability could be added if required.

#### **NOTED**

**the Fostering Agency Annual Report.**

#### **RESOLVED**

**that the Foster Carers Charter be approved.**

#### **CPP/17/9. Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2018- 2019**

The Panel considered a report of the Executive Member for Families, Education and Children on the Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2018-2019. A copy of the report was attached at Appendix A to the Executive Member's report.

Points and comments included:

- Recruitment target met with 11 career fostering households approved and 2 supported lodgings households approved.

- Central Bedfordshire selected as one of the four Fostering Services to participate in a national project; the Fostering Network Muslim Fostering Project. The Marketing, Recruitment and Training Officer and Practice Manager for Fostering attended the closing conference to present Central Bedfordshire's good practice.
- New scheme launched – PACE fostering.
- The cost of training programme for adopters and foster carers was neutral last year neighbouring Local Authorities purchased training for their Foster Carers from Central Bedfordshire Council.
- Target for 2018 – 19 to recruit 15 career fostering households from a range of backgrounds and ethnicities and the implementation the parent and child fostering scheme.
- Recruitment will be a mix of traditional advertising (roundabout signage, radio, bus adverts, posters) with a strong focus on digital advertising such as Facebook, Google Dynamic words and electronic newsletters. Large scale advertising for the recruitment of foster carers recently installed on lamp-posts in the town centres of Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard and Biggleswade.
- Other areas of consideration included the introduction of Fostering Ambassadors, a review of the literature due to new schemes and a review of the duty process to improve the customer journey.
- Work was taking place on creating new video clips of Foster Carers sharing their experiences.
- The Marketing, Recruitment and Training Officer explained that the possibility of information about fostering and adoption recruitment being displayed on digital monitors had been discussed with GP and Dental surgeries in the local area. Suggestions of areas for further promotion were welcomed from CPP members.
- The Executive Member for Families, Education and Children and Lead Members for Children's Services asked members of the Panel to promote recruitment of Foster Carers and Adopters at town and parish meetings as part of their role as a Corporate Parent.

## **NOTED**

**the Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2018-2019.**

**CPP/17/10. Adoption Agency Annual Report 2017/18**

The Panel considered a report of the Executive Member for Families, Education and Children on the Adoption Annual Report 2017/18. A copy of the report was attached at Appendix A to the Executive Member's report.

Points and comments included:

- Highlights for the period of 2017-18 included the membership of the Adoption Panel had remained stable and consistent with committed members and Chair; a joint annual training day had been completed with panel members and social workers; 18 Approvals of prospective adopters (1 more than previous period) and 14 children matched.
- Nationally, the recruitment of adopters had seen a significant reduction so the increased enquiries and continued approval numbers maintained by the Adoption Service in Central Bedfordshire reflected its effective recruitment and service delivery.
- 25 enquiries had been received about adoption support; 18 Adoption support assessments had taken place – a 50% increase in comparison with the previous year.
- 2018/19 Service developments included the recruitment of 20 adopters with a focus on foster for adoption, siblings and complex needs; early permanence via robust permanence planning and the design and the development of the Regional Adoption Agency.
- There were currently 5 children waiting to be adopted; 14 children in adoptive placements pending an order being granted; 5 children who had not been matched as yet.
- Members of the Panel were advised that nationally the number of boys and girls placed for adoption was 50:50.
- In response to the question raised regarding the reason for the delay in the time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (nationally, the lowest rate was 325 days and the highest was 872 days), the Head of Corporate Parenting explained that there was a timescale of 26 weeks within which to complete care proceedings and that a child could not be placed for adoption until the proceedings had been completed. The legal parts of the adoption process have a large impact on the timescale.

**NOTED**

**the Adoption Agency Annual Report 2017/18.**

**CPP/17/11. Adoption Recruitment Strategy 2018-2019**

The Panel considered a report of the Executive Member for Executive Member for Families, Education and Children on the Adoption Recruitment Strategy 2018/19. A copy of the report was attached at Appendix A to the Executive Member's report.

Points and comments included:

- 18 households recommended for approval.
- 14 children considered for a match with prospective adopters.
- 26 children with a plan for adoption.
- Selected by First4Adoption to assist with the launch of National Adoption Week.
- Target for 2018 – 19 to recruit 20 adopters from a range of backgrounds and ethnicities.
- Recruitment will be a mix of traditional advertising (radio, posters, information evenings) with a strong focus on digital advertising such as Facebook, Google Dynamic words and electronic newsletters. Large scale advertising for the recruitment of adopters recently installed on lamp-posts in the town centres of Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard and Biggleswade.
- Other areas of consideration are:
  - o the review of content on website pages
  - o review of literature
  - o design and development of the Regional Adoption Agency.

**NOTED****the Adoption Recruitment Strategy 2018-2019.****CPP/17/12. 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 2018/19.

The Head of Corporate Parenting advised that following a meeting with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Panel to discuss the work programme, the majority of the previously unscheduled reports had now been scheduled.

**RESOLVED**

**that the Corporate Parenting Panel work programme, as attached at Appendix A to the report of the Committee Services Officer, be approved subject to:**

- **The addition of a report on Social Work churn for Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire;**
- **An update on the Peer Review / Ofsted recommendations at the next meeting of the Panel.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 2.05 p.m. and concluded at 4.10 p.m.)

## Central Bedfordshire Council

Corporate Parenting Panel

25 October 2018

Report on Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2017-18

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**Report of:** Sharon Keenan,  
(sharon.keenan@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

**Responsible Director(s):** Sue Harrison,  
(Sue.Harrison@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

### Purpose of this report

1. 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'.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

1. note the content of the report.

### 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, including the timeliness of reviews and participation of children and young people in their reviews.
5. There were 875 reviews held in respect of 386 children during the year from April 2017 to March 2018. 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.

### Conduct of the service

6. The Service has focused 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.

### Conclusions and Next Steps

7. 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.

### **Options for consideration**

8. None required

### **Reason/s for decision**

9. Not applicable

### **Council Priorities**

10. Protecting the vulnerable; improving wellbeing  
A more efficient and responsive Council.

### **Corporate Implications**

### **Legal Implications**

11. 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**

12. 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.
13. 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.
14. 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**

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

## **Conclusion and next Steps**

16. 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:**

17. Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2017/18

## **Background Papers**

18. None

**Report author(s): Sharon Keenan**

**Practice Manager, Children's Services**

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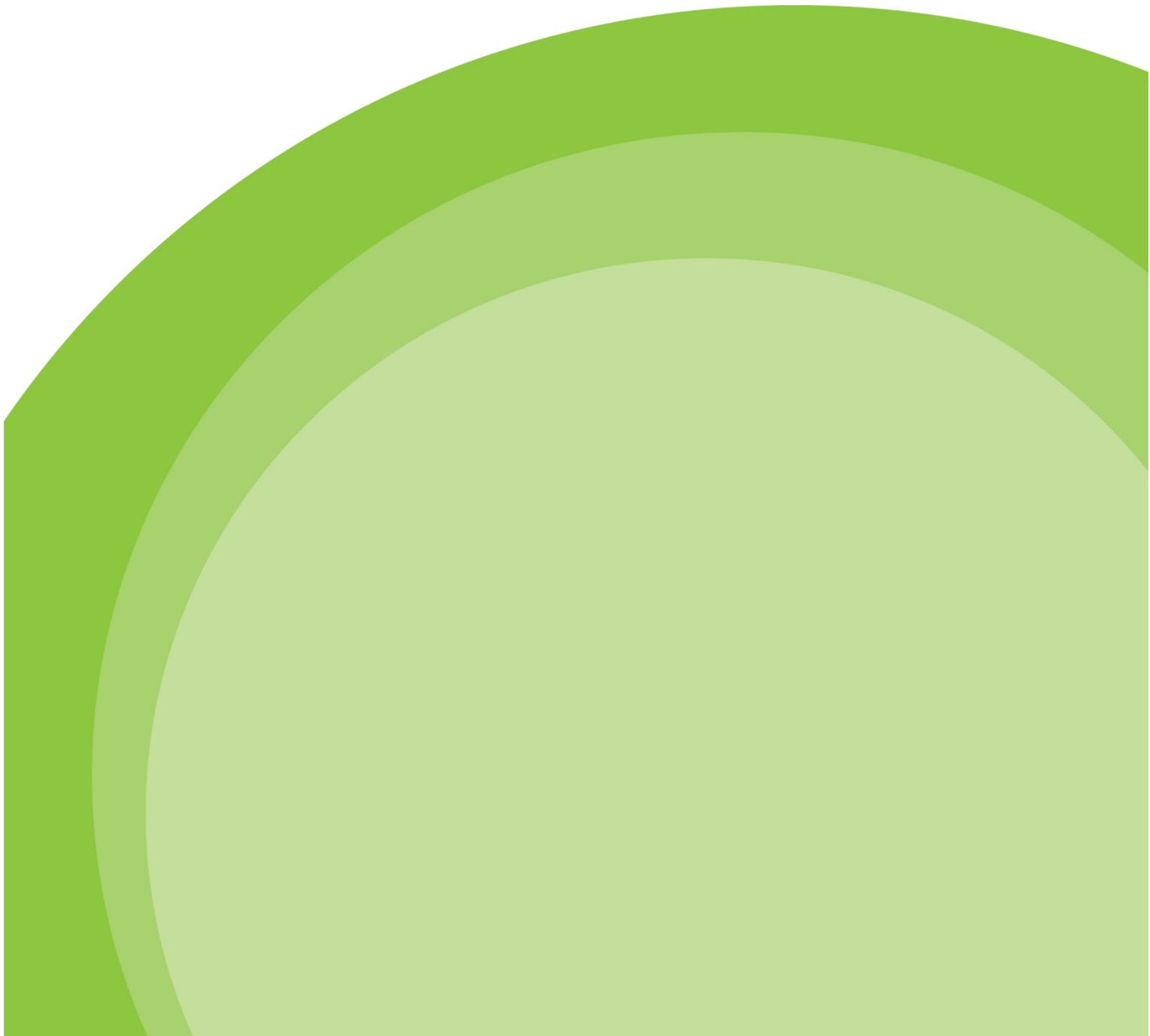
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[www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Quality Assurance  
Children Services Operations



# **Independent Reviewing Officers' Annual Report April 2017 – March 2018**

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 'The IRO Handbook, 2011'. The IROs 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.'*

- 1.3 The Department of Education 'Fostering Better Outcomes: The Government response to the Education Select Committee report into fostering and Foster Care in England' (July 2018), proposed:

*There is potential for IROs to bring about significant practice improvements, alongside their role in ensuring that young people experience the best care from their fostering service. Where IROs are valued and listened to, they provide a legitimate and respected challenge function for individual children's care plans and the wider service delivery (p. 32).*

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 875 reviews were held this year an increase of 3 from 872 last year.
- Timeliness and participation continue to be good.
- A permanent IRO and administrative staff group will ensure excellent continuity to our children.
- IRO caseloads are higher than outlined within statutory guidance, however this is being addressed.
- 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 Children 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 the Conference and Review Service (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. One worker undertakes the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) role in combination with the Review Officer role. The Fostering Review Officer is a member of this Service and has responsibility to conduct annual and additional reviews of Central Bedfordshire Council foster carers, as required in accordance with statutory requirements.

- 2.2 In March 2017, the Service had an establishment of 7.1 FTE (Full Time Equivalent) permanent IRO's, excluding the LADO function. During the year, several changes to the team occurred to support professional development opportunities and personal requests. In June and September two members of staff reduced their hours by one day (.2 and .1 [shared LADO role] FTE) creating a workforce complement of 6.8 FTE. In November 2017, one member of staff was successfully recruited as a Children's Guardian and this subsequent vacancy was filled in May 2018 by an experienced team manager from the Corporate Parenting Service. During this six-month period the team operated at an establishment of 5.8 FTE, however, the level of stability, depth of knowledge and experience within the team during this period provided continuity to our children.
- 2.3 In terms of diversity the team has a good gender balance reflecting the Looked After children population and their views are listened and responded too.

*A female Looked After young person allocated to a male IRO, initially requested a female IRO but her mother who already knew the IRO as he had been allocated to her older son told her daughter 'he is safe you had better to stick with him than change the IRO'. As a result, the young person changed her mind and decided to keep the same IRO.*

- 2.4 Workers come from a range of backgrounds but do not fully reflect the ethnic mix of the 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.
- 2.5 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, Child Protection, Leaving and After Care and supervisory and managerial experience, residential experience, fostering experience and previous work as Children's Guardians. The majority of the team live locally or in neighbouring authorities, and there is a good knowledge of the local area within the team.
- 2.6 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:
- Bi-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.
  - Participation in the monthly audit programme.
  - Attendance at quarterly liaison meetings with CAFCASS.

- Supervision of the Foster Care Review Officer.
- Linking with the Children in Care Council (CiCC).
- Representative at various LSCB sub groups, including the Voice of the Child.

### **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.
  - Involving 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 amended processes developed by the IRO, Corporate Parenting Services and Mosaic Team are successfully embedded. These processes support the teams to simplify and streamline the procedure, 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 which has improved the timeliness of social work reports for reviews and in review recording. Recent changes have been implemented to support the distribution process.

### **4.0 Qualitative Information about the IRO Service**

#### **4.1 The Timeliness of Reviews**

- 4.2 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.

97.3% of LAC reviews due were completed on time which is 292 reviews out of a total of 300 (number of LAC, as at 31<sup>st</sup> March, for whom 1 or more reviews were due during the year and where a review had been completed). This is a slight decrease in performance of 0.3%, (4 reviews) since the previous year attributed to the staffing complement which has been addressed.

- 4.3 The eight were overdue by a few days for a variety of reasons which have been explored and addressed to reduce the risk of any reoccurrence.

- 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 and the second within 3 months of the first. Subsequent reviews are at intervals of no more than 6 months. In addition, reviews will be held if there is a significant change of circumstances or change of 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 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. Children aged under 4 are exempt from this count but IRO's ensure that they seek their views in a variety of ways, such as direct observation and obtaining views from professionals that work with the children. 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, 95% of young people participated in their most recent review, a decrease of 1.6% from the previous year. Children and young people are also actively supported and encouraged to 'chair' their reviews and this is an identified area of development.
- 5.4 A total of 10 young people chose not to participate in their reviews, the same number as reported in March 2017. Six young people were missing at the time of the review. Two young people not available, one as they were sectioned because of mental health difficulties and the other was unwell, however both gave their views to the IRO prior to the meeting. Three young people aged 17 refused to attend.

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

- 5.6 IROs value and promote the work of the CiCC and send referrals of young people who would like to be part of the CiCC. The IROs attended the arranged CiCC summer activity events, including visits to the cinema, sports centre, 'Gulliver's Land', 'Bounce' and horse riding and celebrated the achievements of the Looked After Children by attending the Children in Care Awards evening. The children and young people said they really valued the opportunity to interact and build meaningful relationships with their IROs and felt that the IROs invested in them by spending this time outside of their statutory duties.

## 5.7 Advocacy Service

- 5.8 The IRO Handbook states that before every review the IRO is responsible for making sure that the child understands how an advocate could help and his/her entitlement to one. In April 2017, the Advocacy Service became part of Central Bedfordshire and is delivered by professionals who are independent of the organisation to provide a service that 'reaches out' to all children and young people and ensure that they are appointed an advocate as identified and when they need.
- 5.9 Advocacy is about supporting children and young people to make sure their rights are respected, and their views and wishes are heard. Advocacy provides an opportunity for views to be listened to and properly considered. The advocate works directly for the young person, not the carers or their Social Worker.
- 5.10 Children and young people with child protection and looked after status are able to request the use of an advocate. Any child or young person requesting an advocate who are known to the children with disabilities team can also use an advocate although many of these children and young people will not have child protection or looked after status.
- 5.11 Between April 2017 – March 2018, there were 101 referrals into the advocacy service. A total 70 new requests for children and young people and 31 re-referrals from young people who wanted to use an advocate again.
- 5.12 The referrals originate from the broad spectrum of social work teams and the young person may re-refer directly to the advocate to seek their support for a subsequent issue/support as they often feel confident enough to self-refer. The IRO informs the young person of the Advocacy Service, but it is ordinarily the social worker who will refer in to the service, not the IRO.
- 5.13 Looked After Children and young people are able to request the use of an advocate, including children with disabilities despite not being be looked after or subject to a child protection plan. The majority of the referrals are for 'support at meetings' including Looked After Child Review.

Reason for referral	Numbers referred
Support at meetings	69
Relationships	18
UASC	2
Finance	4
Leaving Care	2
Complaint	2
Placement issues	2
Access to services	1
Support with a name change	1

5.14 Requests for Advocates come from a wide age range of children and young people.

Age of child/young person	How many referrals received for each age
24	1
20	1
19	1
18	2
17	9
16	27
15	15
14	15
13	3
12	4
11	6
10	8
9	3
8	2
7	2
6	2

5.15 Children and Young People have described having an advocate as:

- 😊 *'Helpful, makes things a lot clearer and understandable'.*
- 😊 *'He can now speak to my social worker to find out what is going on'.*
- 😊 *'Very good at listening, took everything on board'.*
- 😊 *'I feel having an advocate helped me a lot in meetings. She helped and encouraged me to speak, when I found it difficult. I wouldn't have been able to do this without the support of an advocate'.*
- 😊 *'If you feel shy and you don't want to go to a meeting the advocate can go for you and explain what you would like'.*

*A young boy in long term foster care requested some support to discuss an increase in contact with his family at his review. An advocate attended his review and as a result the IRO recommended an increase of contact with his mum from 2.5hrs to 3hrs in the community and planned that an extra group contact with his siblings would take place.*

*The young person was extremely happy about the changes, and with the support of his advocate and recommendations of the IRO these changes were implemented. The social worker felt: 'the outcomes were positive and beneficial for the young person.'*

## 5.16 The Voice of the Child

5.17 Consultation booklets are sent out to all young people before their Looked After Children's Review. The booklets were designed by our CiCC and encourage young people to give their views before the meeting about their life and being in care which is then discussed in the meeting. Some young people use the spaces to draw pictures to give their views. This feedback was evaluated, and key themes were identified.

- The majority of children and young people said that they were happy with the current arrangements and where they lived. When they were asked if there anything else that you would like to know about being in care, most children and young people did not have any questions, however a few asked questions including '*why their parent was unable to care for them?*' and, '*how long they will I be in this foster placement?*' One said, '*my sister is still annoying me*' and went on to say I would like '*no sister to be with me*'. Of the sample, 90% said that they felt safe in their placement.
- Most children and young people said that they liked school especially being with their friends, the teachers, some subjects and lunch. When asked if they could change anything a few said the '*subjects*', '*hot dinners*' and '*other children being naughty to me*'. When asked if they felt safe at school, this reduced to 60% of the same sample group of children and young.
- They all felt that they were healthy, and the majority said that they have attended their health appointment and would know who to contact if they were unwell.
- The majority of children and young people said that they were happy with how often they saw their Social Worker and said that they would contact them using the phone, email, text or via their foster carer.
- The children and young people said that in their spare time they liked to see their friends, do activities of watch TV or play computer games.
- As highlighted in last year's report, the most significant area of concern identified is that a large number of children and young people said that they were not happy with the contact arrangements with their family. When asked for more detail, they said that would like more contact with those they currently saw, unsupervised contact, or different people.
- When asked about if someone had explained to them what an advocate was, approximately 50% said '*no*', and asked if they would like an advocate one third said '*yes*'. However, it was not asked if they had already had one, as it was not necessarily the same children who said that they did not know what one was.



## 5.18 The Voice of the Child - MOMO

5.19 To improve the range of options available to children and young people to support and encourage them to share their views the MOMO app was introduced since September 2017.



5.20 MOMO stands for 'Mind Of My Own' and is an app used by children and young people primarily over the age of 10 although it is available to all ages. The MOMO app gives children and young people an instant and convenient way to express their views, wishes and feelings, and Social Workers a smart way to record these as it is downloaded onto children and young people's mobiles, tablets, or computers and is an interactive and engaging process for them to use as and when they want to. A young person can sign up to MOMO on their own and are encouraged to use it to obtain their views about anything they choose, however the focus is about their life, the work of children's service and the decisions made about them. The app enables children and young people to share their wishes and feelings with their worker and this feedback is attached to the case records.

5.21 This app is a great tool used for all children and young people, including those who are Looked After and is an alternative consultation form for Looked After Reviews. The aim is to replace the use of the current paper system and use of the consultation booklet so that the majority, if not all future consultations are completed electronically, which will aid analysis and recording onto the child's file for future reference.

5.22 Since the introduction of the MOMO app, the feedback has been used to contribute to the CBSCB online Voice of the Child survey to underpin effective safeguarding arrangements for children and young people, including those whom are looked after. The survey aims to ensure that children and young people are consulted about the delivery of services they access, and their views are heard. The information gathered from the survey is fed back to the CBSCB and used to improve services for children, young people and their families.

5.23 The survey is on our CBSCB website and is accessed via:

<http://www.centralbedfordshirelscb.org.uk/lscb-website/children-and-young-people/your-views>

5.24 Since the introduction, 162 young people have contributed to this survey via the MOMO app of which 91 (56%) are girls and 71 (44%) are boys. Although the MOMO app is targeted to be used for children and young people aged 10 years plus, the children using it record themselves as between 5-15 years of age which may be possible as they are supported to complete it by their carer, Social Worker, or IRO. When reviewed via Mosaic, the Children's Services record indicates that none of the young people who used MOMO are identified as having a disability.

	September – December 2017	January – March 2018	Total
Boys	43	28	71
Girls	55	36	91
<b>Total</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>162</b>

5.25 Prior to attending a meeting, visit or contact with their worker whom may be an IRO the young person is asked *'how did you feel before coming today?'* They may choose more than one answer from the selection as below or choose their own of which 30 young people said *'okay'*, 5 said *'hopeful'*, 3 said *'pleased'* and 1 *'relieved'*. No young people said that they would like the meeting, visit or contact to be at a different time, place or to see someone else.

This survey is being developed to capture the voice of the young people once they have attended the meeting and this will provide valuable feedback to identify how the service may be improved.

How did you feel before coming today?	September – December 2017	January – March 2018	Total
Happy	99	45	144
Excited	12	12	24
Enthusiastic	4	2	6
Calm	46	21	67
Unsure	40	3	43
Angry	8	5	13
Confused	20	2	22
Worried	8	5	13
Sad	4	0	4
Nervous	3	3	6

5.26 As part of the CBSCB survey, young people are asked *'is there anything else that you wish to say?'* It is interesting to note that 75 of the 162 have provided an additional comment from the MOMO selection, of which 13% have said that they *'would like to be listened to more'*, 2% have said *'to be treated differently'*.

Is there anything else?	September – December 2017	January – March 2018	Total
Said they would like to be listened more	8	14	22
Nothing	0	22	22
More Support	0	12	12
To be treated differently	3	1	4
I don't know	15	0	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>75</b>

5.28 The information obtained as part of the consultation process via the consultation booklets and, or MOMO app completed by the children and young people is shared with the IRO prior to their Review and underpins the discussion and decision making about their current care arrangements and if changes are needed to reflect their views.

## 5.28 Feedback from Young People about their IRO

5.29 Young people said they have a good relationship with their IRO and that their IRO know them well and made comments like:

*'The only one that has been there from the start'*

*'It was good to have you in my corner'*

## 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.

6.2 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.

6.3 Overall 69% (606/875) of reviews record parental participation, reflecting one or both parents either attending 33% (292/875) or contributing to the review process. There remains a far greater participation by mothers than fathers. Mothers' views were obtained for 65% (571/875) of reviews, fathers for 45% (391/875). For those cases where parental views are not obtained the reason is recorded. In a small percentage 4% (6/147) of cases both parents have died.

6.4 There are some parents whose whereabouts are unknown 9% (77/875) of mothers, and 21% (183/875) of fathers an improvement of 2% and 1% respectively from the previous year. In some cases, parents are invited but do not attend 15% (133/875) mothers, 11% fathers (100/875). 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 results in every concern raised being resolved through informal discussion and exploration of the matter. However, during this period one formal complaint was received from a foster carer on behalf of the young person due to the timeliness of the distribution of their Review minutes and steps have been taken to reduce this reoccurring.

Positive feedback is often verbal and not routinely captured, however this is an example:

*PCW, aged 17 has been Looked After since aged 11.*

*His Social Worker has changed in the last 12 months, however the IRO has remained the same for over 6 years and has a long-term relationship with P and his parents. His placement became fragile and he was also school refusing and consequently due to the changes of Social Worker and his difficulties the IRO reviewed P every 3 months to offer support and oversight.*

*P's mother refused to speak to the Social Worker, however it was agreed that she would speak to the IRO every 3 months for an update and the IRO visits P every 2-3 months for a coffee and they communicate by text in between.*

*P states the IRO is 'the only one who has been there since the start'.*

## **8.0 The Conduct of the Organisation in Relation to the Review and IRO impact**

- 8.1 Conference and Review Service (CRS) sit within Professional Standards and the quality assurance role is central to the IRO's 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. Following development with the Mosaic team and IROs these forms are now part of the Mosaic process. One 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. An additional form provides qualitative feedback in respect of care planning, children's participation, and appropriate involvement with family and partnership working with other agencies.
- 8.3 The relevant Team Manager receives both feedback forms. Feedback on practice includes good practice as well as any areas of concern. The qualitative feedback is 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 Team Manager will share with the Social Worker in supervision and if any identified actions are needed and ensure these are completed.
- 8.4 Conference and Review hold bi-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 CRS which is circulated to the relevant Heads of Service. This process ensures that feedback on practice is shared with the individual Social Worker and Team Manager and an overview is given to Heads of Service.

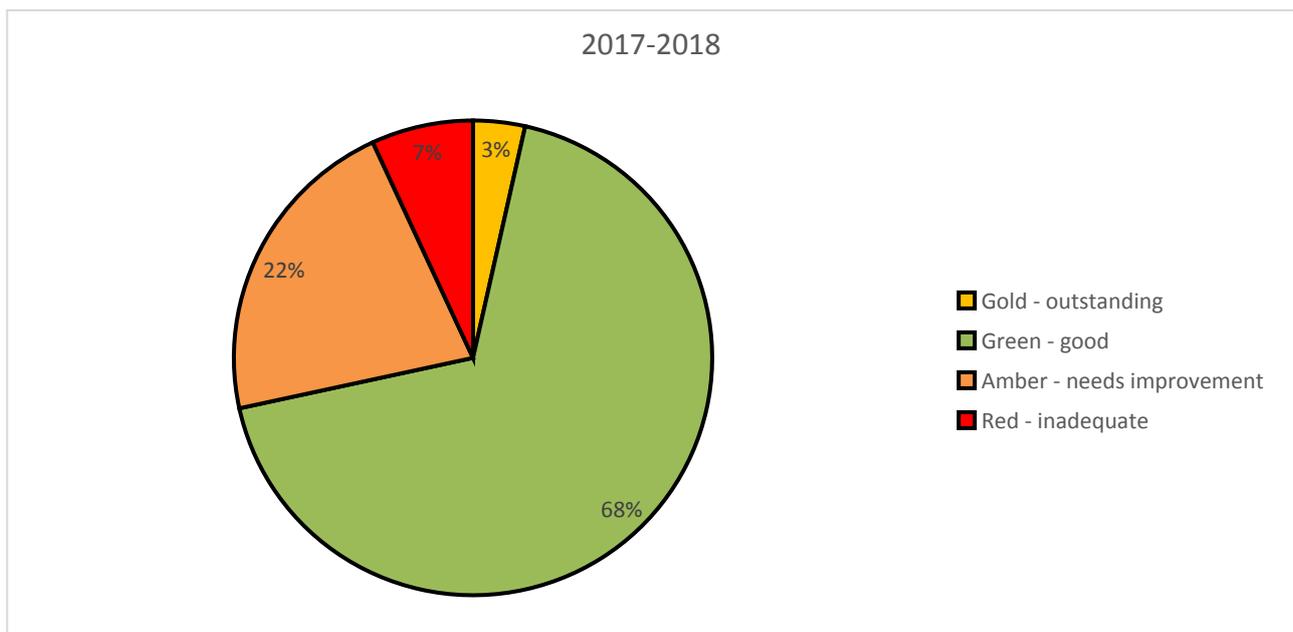
*NK – aged 14, had been accommodated due to long term neglect.*

*N informed the IRO at the pre-LAC review meeting that she was unhappy in her placement; that she had been to school with holes in her shoes and the carers were not allowing her to have hot school meals.*

*The IRO spoke immediately with the child's SW and the foster carers SW and requested a move.*

*This was supported by both Social Worker's and N was moved within 10 days to what is now her long-term placement where she is thriving.*

- 8.5 Examples of good practice are highlighted in the Quality Assurance Meetings and recorded in the minutes.
- 8.6 For the period of 2017, a total of 14 meetings took place in the key areas of Children's Services who are allocated Looked After Children and discussed 352 children and a total of 792 Looked After Children reviews. The rating awarded in relation to the quality of social work practice, wider service provision and the outcomes for the young person was reviewed, which was as shown below:



- 8.7 The grading of practice is consistently high as shown above. Of the 792 quality monitoring forms completed, 28 (3%) have been graded as gold, that is outstanding practice, 544 (68%) children as green, that is good practice 172 (22%) as amber and 55 (7%) as red.

- 8.8 The identified themes in relation to areas of improvement have been addressed in a variety of ways both operationally and strategically as required. For example, in response to changing the child's care plan the IRO's completed presentations at operational team meetings and actioned the strategic changes required at a whole Service level. The implementation and impact on practice relating to these identified themes will be subject to further review to measure the impact of this learning and the outcomes to children and young people.

*ED - a young person aged 17, was in care subject to section 20 and although soon to be 18 and no longer be in care, will continue to have the support of the Local Authority as a care leaver until she is 21 years old. The IRO assessed the practice as a 'red' raised concerns that the young person was unsafe in her current placement and there was no evidence of the placement preparing her for independence and highlighted these concerns at an operational and strategic level, that is the social worker, team manager, and the commissioning team. As a result, ED moved placement and described the situation as 'much better'. The placement was described as taking a proactive approach to meeting her needs and work regarding her independent living skills work commenced.*

*The subsequent review and practice was rated as 'green'.*

## **9.0 Conduct of the Organisation in Relation to the Case**

### **Procedures for Resolution of Concerns**

- 9.1 CRS 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-centred manner. CRS has a Quality Assurance Process in place as 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, that is a referral to CAF/CASS which will usually occur when a dispute raised through this process has not been resolved in a timely way. The IRO Service has implemented the CAF/CASS 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 concerns will be raised with the Team Manager through the existing Quality Assurance Process. The rating system in place ensures that more urgent or serious matters are highlighted. Cases rated amber or red are tracked through the Quality Assurance Meetings until resolved or escalated into formal dispute, if appropriate, again until resolved.
- 9.6 A failure to respond or 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 As a result of the Ofsted inspection, 2017 and comments specifically referring to the IRO role and oversight has resulted in a review of the Dispute Resolution Procedure which has resulted in the number of escalations increasing which is attributed to the process being 'refreshed' and a robust threshold of application.
- 9.8 The number of escalations has increased this year to 18 for Looked After Children from 9 the previous year.
- 9.9 Areas of concern that have been identified via the Dispute Resolution process have included the following issues:
- Delay in achieving permanency for the child, and, or action to match sibling group to placement.
  - LAC planning not completed in timescale.
  - Placement choice.
  - Allocation of Independent Visitor.
  - Plans to secure independent living arrangements.
- 9.10 Most escalations have been resolved by the Team Manager, however if a resolution is not achieved at this stage it is escalated to the Head of Corporate Parenting who has chaired complex case discussions enabling a thorough exploration of the concerns and options and contributing positively to an agreed resolution.

*C – aged 17, residing in a semi-independent provision contacted the IRO as deeply unhappy and worried about her future plans and being made homeless when she turned 18. C was informed that she would have to leave and move to temporary accommodation while her housing application is processed.*

*This escalation resulted in a meeting being convened with the IRO, Team Manager and Social worker and it was agreed that her placement would be extended whilst her housing was secured. Team Manager pursued in communication with Housing Provider. Audit Manager undertook an audit on the case.*

- 9.11 A small number of disputes have been escalated to Head of Service, however escalation to the Assistant Director, independent Legal Advice, or a referral to CAFCASS has not been required.
- 9.12 One IRO implemented another Local Authority's Dispute Resolution Procedure to highlight a concern regarding their practice and seek a resolution:

*'A 10-year-old young person subject to an Adoption Order resided in Central Bedfordshire area as she was placed twice with adopters by a neighbouring Local Authority. However, it is regrettable that on both occasions the adoptive placements broke down and consequently she became a Looked After Child in Central Bedfordshire because of the location of her former adoptive home and is now being supported by Central Bedfordshire Children's Services in a long-term foster placement which is planned to be her permanent home. The young person is settled and happy there but understandable was devastated by the break-down of her adoptions.*

*The IRO was keen that the original Local Authority complete a review of the two adoption breakdowns in order to avoid similar problems and to assist with future planning for this young person. The IRO requested this request for a meeting as part of the LAC review process, however as this did not proceed escalated this outstanding issue and implemented the other Local Authority's Dispute Resolution Procedures.*

*Subsequently a review meeting to reflect on the potential causes for the adoption breakdowns was held, which has helped to inform future planning with young person, as well as providing her former adopters with an opportunity to share their experiences'.*

- 9.13 Exploratory discussions have been held with partner agencies to extend the use of the Dispute Resolution Procedure as a feedback tool not just in relation to the practice of Children's Services but incorporate partner agencies.

*R, aged 14 came into care in March 2016 following concerns regarding physical abuse by mother.*

*R and his mother were keen to engage in therapy as they both recognised that there are some difficult issues in their relationship which they need support with resolving. Discussion with the IRO led to a recommendation to explore a referral to the local therapeutic provision however the response was that they could not provide a service as they do not undertake direct work with birth families for Looked After Children. The team convened a complex case discussion and agreed that the NICE guidelines would be reviewed, and the decision challenged, however if they did not accept the referral the social worker had identified an alternative provider and the LA would pursue family therapy that would be funded privately.*

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

- 10.1 A plan is progressing to ensure that CRS are appropriately resourced to deliver an effective IRO Service. Throughout the year there have been pressure points when the numbers of children requiring a service, primarily the children subject of a Child

Protection Plan has risen and subsequently the numbers of conferences required as the IRO has a dual role. This is closely monitored and on occasions the IROs caseloads have exceeded the national guidance, however additional funding has been granted to recruit an additional IRO post for a fixed period of 2 years to address this issue.

- 10.2 There have been a number of changes within the Corporate Parenting Service, however plans are in place to address this and ensure that a full complement of permanent employees are in post to ensure continuity of care for children and young people.
- 10.3 A key focus of issues that affect young people is placement choice, placement stability, and achieving permanence for all Looked After Children. Plans are progressing to ensure that these actions are met and exceeded.

**11.0 Updates regarding the progress of action plans including the Ofsted Action Plan 2017**

- 11.1 The IRO Service has worked closely with the Corporate Parenting Teams in respect of achieving permanence for all children and young people. Various strategies have been implemented to address this, including:

Permanency Tracking Meetings introduced in November 2017, take place as a fortnightly case review meeting coordinated by the Practice Manager of CRS and attended by all Practice Managers at which cases are presented by the allocated Social Worker and Team Manager to review the permanence plan for each child.

- 11.2 Permanency Tracking Meetings have identified and addressed issues which may have previously caused undue delay and has resulted in the development of a strategic action plan to 'achieve permanence for all' (dated July 2017) which is in the process of being implemented. However, as a basis the following has been achieved:
- The issue and need for permanency / stability is now clearly focussed and timescales to achieve this are being challenged and reduced as part of the Permanency Tracking meeting.
  - The Permanency Tracking process includes the start date of the when the child or young person entered care to ensure that permanency plans are highlighted with an aim to be secured at the second review for each child.
  - The records of the Permanency Tracking Meetings are now recorded onto each child's file and the Permanency Panel Tracking database, which is in the process of being enhanced to support the identification of emerging key themes.
  - The Performance Tracking database now incorporates children subject to PLO (Public Law Outline) which were previously held on a separate database.

*A young person, C had been in an Independent Foster Agency placement for 3 years and the IRO assessed that funding should be secured to enable this placement to be secured as his long term.*

*A complex case discussion was held and as a consequence it was agreed that this should be progressed. This has now been achieved and C is described as having made great progress in terms of his social skills, being far more confident and contained.*

- 11.2 The IRO Service is represented at a weekly multi-agency meeting that reviews all children and young people requiring additional services and resources. This meeting provides senior management oversight in relation to practice, decision making and consistency that resources are evenly and fairly provided. The IRO representation provides independent input and robust challenge.
- 11.3 CRS are embedding the use of disruption meetings chaired by an IRO, for occasions when long term placements breakdown to now include young people whom are in a placement for 12 months or more.
- 11.4 The CRS leads a bi-monthly Quality Assurance Meeting with the Corporate Parenting Team. The practice, progress and outcomes of individual and all children and young people is reviewed and identified areas of development, learning and improvement are identified for the organisation and actioned as required. It has been agreed that this will form part of a quarterly report to be presented to Senior Managers
- 11.5 IROs continue to undertake additional learning and development. One member of the team attended a Post Qualifying course at the University of Bedfordshire and all IROs regularly access and attend formal and informal opportunities for learning to address and anticipate the changing profile of our Looked After Children population and their needs.

*KB - A young person aged 15 arrived from Iraq alone and was immediately placed into a Pakistani Muslim household in a neighbouring authority under section 20 of the Children Act 1989. The IRO completed an initial visit prior the LACR and the young person asked to be moved to an "English foster placement". Through the use of the interpreter, he was very adamant, and said that he did not want to be with an Asian Muslim family, but he wanted to be in an English-speaking home, with English people. This created a dilemma for the professionals involved as they considered that his needs would be better met in the multi-racial community where he was placed as there are many Muslim families and some Iraqi young people. However, listening to him and hearing his voice the IRO was aware of an available placement in a Bedfordshire village whose last young person who was an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker had successfully been reunited with his father. The foster carers work with this previous young man had been outstanding as she learnt to cook food of his Country of origin, took him to the local Mosque, met the Iman and welcomed his friends to her home to socialise.*

*The IRO and the SW spoke to this foster carer and within 5 days moved, he moved to his new foster placement where he has been for the last 12 months and is flourishing. At each meeting he thanks the IRO for listening to his wishes as he aspires to be a doctor or a politician. The carer identified an English summer school which both the virtual school and Corporate Parenting funded and within 3 months the young man was able to speak English fluently.*

- 11.6 The IRO Service has 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. CRS works 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.

- 11.7 A permanent Foster Care Review Officer has been in post since early 2016 and this has proved to be an asset within the organisation. The Review Officer periodically attends CRS team meetings, and this has provided a closer working relationship with all IRO's and the joint views regarding quality of placements. IROs routinely provide the Review Officer a copy of the monitoring form, which includes their views on the quality of care provided by the CBC foster carer for the child and young person reviewed. Plans are in place to enhance the role of the Foster Care Review Officer and develop a stronger quality assurance monitoring role based upon the current model used for Looked After Children reviews.
- 11.8 Continued improvements have been made to the effectiveness of the Quality Assurance Feedback loop with the commissioning team

*R – aged 14 is in care (s31) and placed with foster carers.*

*At a LAC review in 2017, R was to be referred for an independent visitor, however at the following LAC Review an Independent Visitor had not been appointed and R highlighted in his consultation booklet that he still wanted one.*

*The IRO escalated this to the Team Manager and the Commissioning Team. As a result, the provider acknowledged the delay in appointing an Independent Visitor due service delivery and the availability of a suitable 'match', which has been addressed through the commissioning arrangements.*

- 11.9 The revised monitoring form includes feedback on Commissioned Services, including placements, The Children's Society, CAMHS provision and other specialist services.
- 11.10 Both the previous Commissioning Manager and the Quality Assurance Manager from Commissioning continue to attend CRS Team Meetings regularly to 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. The QA manager always seeks feedback from the IRO on placements which are included in the Commissioning QA report and any concerns raised are followed up.
- 11.11 A close working relationship between the IRO's and the QA manager has assisted in 'closing the loop' on issues in residential / 16+ placements and enabling the QA Manager to challenge and monitor providers to a high standard.
- 11.12 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 recorded on the child's record and the use of mobile technology is available to all IRO's and actively used. The use of mobile technology provides a more accessible, alternative form of communication for young people with the use of Skype and Facetime and provides a different medium to obtain their wishes and views via the different applications that are available.

11.13 The Participation Officer is part of the Professional Standards Service and has attended IRO team meetings to ensure that we continually review the knowledge and experiences of young people within care. An IRO is 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 any emerging National Guidance.
- Achieve 'permanence for all' Looked After Children
- Strengthen the Voice of the Child within the Looked After Children process.
- Review the Looked After Child Review format and implement changes to ensure that they are child focused and engage with young people in a meaningful way.
- Continue to develop the work with the CICC.
- IROs to provide a robust and effective case review.
- Ensure appropriate and proportionate case overview by IROs to include external agencies provision of service.
- Implement and appropriate and proportionate case overview and effective challenge to improve practice of Fostering Reviews.

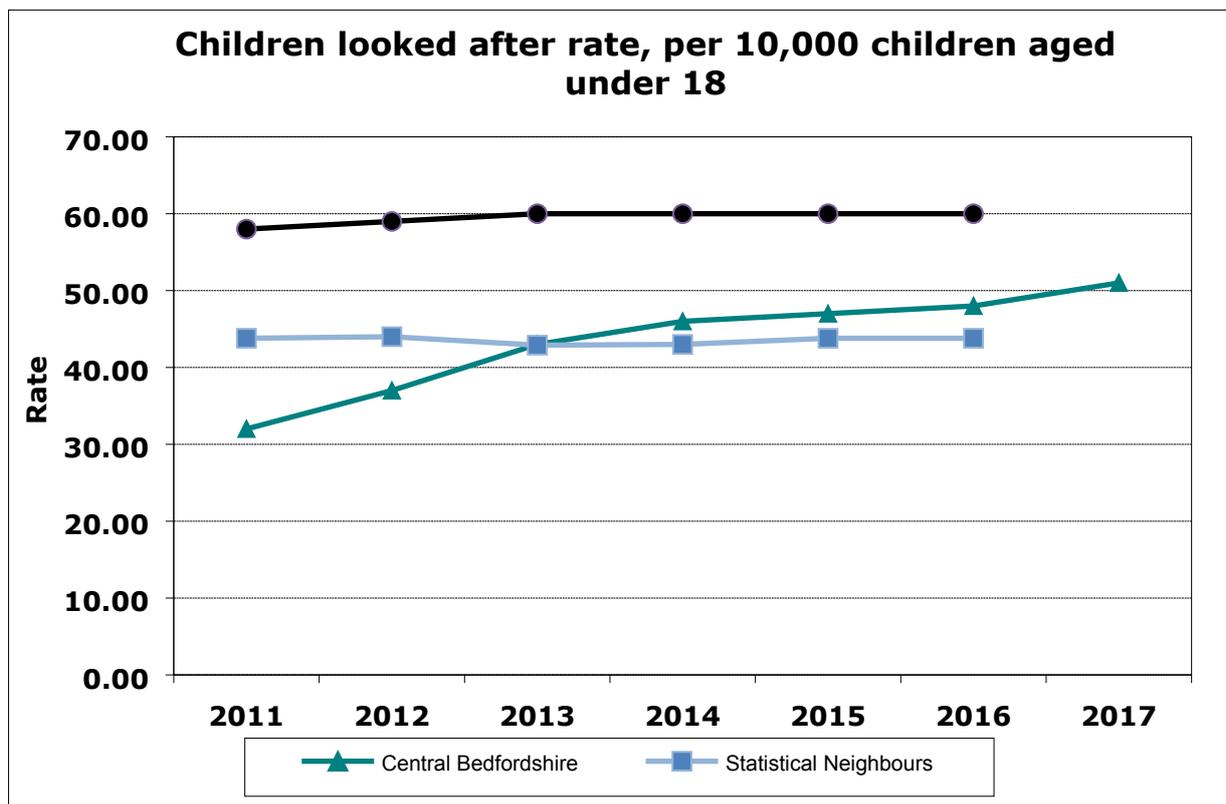
Sharon Keenan  
Practice Manager  
Conference and Review Service

**Appendix A**

**Quantitative Information about the IRO Service**

A total of 386 children have been through the review system in the 12 months ending 31/03/2018, a decrease of 28 children.

A total of 875 reviews were held in the year, an increase of 3 from the previous year.



**Notes**

- (i) The Looked After Children population for the past seven 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 312, in comparison to this time last year (March 2017), there has been a 3.0% increase in the number of LAC from 303 to 312 children. The current rate per 10,000 population stands at 50.9 compared to 50.8 recorded at this time last year, which is higher than the 2016/17 SN average of 45.1.

Of this total number of Children Looked After of 312, 37 were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) which represents 11.9% of all looked after children. The number of LAC excluding UASC stands at 275 children at the end of March, which is an increase of 7.0% compared to March last year where 257 non-UASC children were looked after.

- (ii) The IRO Handbook recommends that caseloads 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, during this year caseloads varied between 65 at the beginning of the year to the 90’s from November until March 2018 due to the departure of one staff member and the successful recruitment to this post in May 2018. However, 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. LAC numbers have remained stable over the past year, however there has been a steady increase in the numbers of children subject to a Child Protection plan. This is closely monitored and as the IRO's caseloads have exceeded the national guidance, additional funding has been granted to recruit an additional IRO post for a fixed period of 2 years to address this issue.

**Composition of the Looked After Children Population (as of: 31/03/17)**

Total 312

**Ethnicity**

	White	Mixed	Asian	Black	Other
CBC Local School Population	88%	5%	2%	2%	1%
National Funded School Population 31/01/12	78%	4%	9%	5%	2%
<b>CBC Children Looked After 31/03/18</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>8%</b>
National Children Looked After 31/03/17	75%	9%	5%	7%	3%

**Age**

Age at 31 March 2018					
	BOYS	GIRLS	Total CBC	% CBC	National 31/03/17
Under 1	9	10	19	6%	3%
1-4	18	10	28	9%	12%
5-9	44	30	74	24%	24%
10-15	55	56	111	36%	33%
16-17	56	24	80	26%	28%
18 & over and placed in a Community Home	0	0	0		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>100%</b>	100%
CBC %	58%	42%			
31/03/17 National %	56%	44%			

## Legal Status

Legal Status at 31 March 2018			
	CBC	% CBC	National 31/03/17
Care Orders Interim	46	15%	14%
Care Orders Full	173	55%	55%
Voluntary Agreements under S20 (Single Period of Accommodation)	69	22%	23%
Placement Order	22	7%	8%
Sentenced to CYPA 1969 Supervision Order with Residence Requirement	0	0%	-
On remand, committed for trial, or detained	2	1%	-
Emergency Orders or Police Protection	0	0%	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Placement

Placement at 31 March 2018			
	CBC	% CBC	National 31/03/17
Foster Placement with Relative or Friend	30	10%	73%
Placement with other Foster Carer	186	60%	
Secure Unit	0	8%	11%
Homes and Hostels	18		
Hostels and Other Supportive Residential Placements	0		
Residential Schools	1	0%	1%
Other Residential Settings	6	0%	1%
Placed for Adoption (Including placed with Former Foster Carer)	12	2%	3%
Placed with Own Parents	16	4%	6%
In Lodgings, Residential Employment or Living Independently	41	13%*	4%
Absent from Agreed Placement	0	0%	-
Other Placement	2	3%	1%
	0	0%	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Notes

This table indicates that the number of Looked After Children 'in Lodgings, Residential Employment or Living Independently' is high compared at 13% compared to the National figure of 4%. Analysis indicates that this is due to the profile of our Looked After Child population and the number of UASC and their age as 25 of the 41 LAC are UASC, and UASC are in these types of placements due to their age profile (16+). Taking this into account and removing the UASC's from this cohort then the percentage for CBC would be 5.5% (16 out of 287), which is much closer to the National average at 4%.

## Action Plan 2017-2018

Priority	Actions	Timescale	Outcomes
Respond to recent and any emerging National Guidance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Brief IRO's through circulation, discussion at team meeting highlighting of key changes and IRO responsibilities.</li> <li>2. Team Development days to take place quarterly.</li> <li>3. Create 'specialist' roles for each IRO to lead and develop knowledge and practice across the organisation based upon research and good practice.</li> </ol>	<p>Monthly</p> <p>September/January /March 2019</p> <p>November 2018</p>	1-3 Implementation of statutory guidance.
Achieve 'permanence for all' Looked After Children	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Work closely with the Corporate Parenting Teams in respect of achieving permanence for all children and young people to implement the permanency action plan.</li> </ol>	Commence August 2018	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All relevant children will have a clear permanence plan secured by their 2<sup>nd</sup> LAC Review.</li> </ol>
Strengthen the Voice of the Child within the Looked After Children process	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ensure that all Looked After Children's views are represented in the LAC review in the most appropriate way for the individual young person and strengthen the use of the MOMO app.</li> <li>2. Identified IRO to lead on this and share progress and actions into LSCB sub group, in partnership with an appointed young person.</li> </ol>	<p>November 2018</p> <p>Quarterly</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Voice of the Child is evidenced in all meetings and contributes to the recommendations regarding future care planning. IROs listen and respond to the voice of children and young people.</li> <li>1. The relevant LAC records will include an electronic copy of their wishes and feelings for each Review</li> <li>1-2 Feedback will be analysed and identified themes and issues will be actioned to improve practice and</li> </ol>

			outcomes for all children that will include their voice before and after attendance at a meeting.
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"> <li>1. Review the current LAC review format and explore alternative practice to create child centred reviews.</li> <li>2. Formulate and implement an action plan to introduce a new format of the LAC reviews.</li> <li>3. Introduce the electronic distribution of reports</li> </ol>	<p>September 2018</p> <p>November 2018</p> <p>July 2018</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1-2 The LAC review is child centred and their voice and participation including chairing reviews. underpins the review.</li> <li>3 Effective, efficient use of resources.</li> </ol>
Continue the development work with the CiCC	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Timetable annual consultation events</li> <li>2. Identified IRO to lead on this and feed into LSCB sub group, in partnership with an appointed young person.</li> </ol>	<p>September 2018</p> <p>Twice Yearly</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1-2 IROs listen and respond to the voice of children and young people.</li> </ol>
IROs to provide a robust and effective case review.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. For identified high risk cases, for example CSE IROs to have an increased level of overview and more regular contact with the Social Worker and young person.</li> <li>2. IRO's to attend multi agency care planning meetings when children/young people going through a significant transition</li> <li>3. A quarterly report reporting quality of practice and identifying themes from Quality Assurance Meeting to be presented to Senior Management Team.</li> </ol>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Quarterly</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1-2 IROs offer a proportionate level of scrutiny and support dependent on the individual child's circumstances.</li> <li>3 Themes and issue will be analysed and actioned agreed to improve practice and outcomes for all children.</li> </ol>
Ensure appropriate and proportionate case overview by IROs to include external agencies provision of service.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continue to review the Dispute Resolution Framework including, threshold, timescales, flow chart and recording processes.</li> </ol>	<p>September 2018</p> <p>October 2018</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1-2 Themes and issue will be analysed and actioned agreed to improve practice and outcomes for all children.</li> </ol>

	<p>2. Explore the application of the Dispute Resolution Framework to include the practice of external agencies.</p>		
<p>Implement and appropriate and proportionate case overview and effective challenge to improve practice of Fostering Reviews.</p>	<p>1. Enhance the role of the Foster Care Review Officer and develop a stronger quality assurance monitoring role based upon the current model used for Looked After Children reviews.</p>	<p>October 2018</p>	<p>1 Fostering Review manager scrutiny and support of service provision dependent on the individual child’s circumstances.</p> <p>1 Themes and issue will be analysed and actioned agreed to improve practice and outcomes for all children.</p>

**Central Bedfordshire Council**

**CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL**

25 October 2018

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**Looked After Children Social Worker Stability**

Report of Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services  
([Sue.Harrison@Centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Sue.Harrison@Centralbedfordshire.gov.uk))

Advising Officers:

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Alex Coman, Head of Corporate Parenting  
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**Purpose of this report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide information for consideration on social work stability for looked after children in Central Bedfordshire.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

1. Note the content of the report
2. Comment on the report

**Introduction**

2. The Corporate Parenting Panel has asked to be advised on the social work stability for looked after children in Central Bedfordshire.
3. This report will reference and comment upon the Children's Commissioner Stability Index data, published in August 2018. This report allows us to benchmark Central Bedfordshire Council Children's Services against the national picture in terms of performance on social work stability for looked after children against the regional and national picture. In this data, social work instability is defined as two or more changes of social worker in 12 months. Repeated social work instability is defined as looked after children who have two or more social workers in 2015/16 and 2016/17.

## Local Context

4. Central Bedfordshire Council currently holds Corporate Parenting responsibility for 311 children. Whilst the number of looked after children has remained stable overall, the composition of this group is continuously subject to some change, with care episodes ending for some children and beginning for others.
5. In Central Bedfordshire in most cases children become looked after when they are receiving a social work service in the Assessment or the Family Support Services. When children become looked after, social worker case responsibility is transferred to the specialist Corporate Parenting Service. This service is composed of the Court and Permanence Team and the 13+ and Care Leavers Team, with allocation within the service depending on the age and legal status of the child.
6. The transfer points and related changes of social worker for children are built into our processes and form part of the child's journey so that children receive an expert service from specialist social workers that is responsive to the particular circumstances of the child. Changes of social worker in these circumstances are carefully managed and planned for to minimise disruption for children at these points of transition.
7. When children become looked after they are also allocated an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The IRO is an experienced and independent social worker. IROs visit the child they are responsible for and hold the social worker and partner agencies to account, to ensure that the child's plan progresses in line with the child's wishes, feelings and assessed needs. The IRO continues to work with the child regardless of any changes in social workers, providing an additional layer of stability for our children.
8. As for all children who receive a social work service, looked after children may also have a change of social worker when the social worker changes job, if a social worker has an extended period of sick leave or, exceptionally, when a child asks for a change of social worker. In these circumstances the team manager will ensure that a planned case transfer takes place and the child is allocated to a social worker within the same team within the Corporate Parenting Service. This means that the same supervising manager continues to have oversight of the child's situation and their needs. The Ofsted Inspection 2017 noted that case transfers were well planned for in Central Bedfordshire.
9. We believe that consistency of Social Worker enables positive relationships to be developed between children and their Social Worker and for this reason we strive to sustain Social Work stability. The importance of stability is exemplified by one of young people who has recently nominated their Social Worker for a national award stating in their written nomination that:

*"EH is funny, kind, calm and humble. I didn't really want to talk to anyone about how I was feeling. I was worried that people would try and push me*

*to tell them my thoughts. EH isn't like that. She made me laugh and eventually I opened up and I'm so happy that I did."*

## Findings

10. The Children's Commissioner provided the most recent collated Stability Index data on 14 August 2018. This provides bench marking data for Central Bedfordshire Council Children's Services against 77 other local authorities that submitted data, in respect of the Children Commissioner's three measures of stability: care placement, school placement and changes in social worker. The data gathered is in respect of 2015/16 and 2016/17. The full report is attached for the reference of Members.
11. In terms of social work stability 24% (73) of our looked after children had two or more changes of social worker in 2016/17. This is lower than the national average of 26% and higher than the eastern region average of 21%. 6% of our looked after children had two or more changes of social worker in both 2015/16 and 2016/17. This is the same as the national average and higher than the eastern region average of 3%.
12. It should be noted that Central Bedfordshire Council has significantly lower rates of single year (2016/17) social worker instability for 5-11 year old children, with 11% (102) having two or more social workers in one year compared to the eastern region average of 18% and the national average of 24%. Also, single year social worker instability (2016/17) for children aged 12-15 years, at 18%, was lower than the eastern region average of 20% and national average of 24%.
13. However single year instability (2016/17) for children aged 0-4 years was higher in Central Bedfordshire at 36% (45 children) compared to the eastern region average of 23% and national average of 30%. For the same period, instability rates were higher for children aged 16+ in Central Bedfordshire at 38% (86 children) compared to the eastern region average of 24% and national average of 25%.
14. Repeated social work instability is defined by the Children's Commissioner as children having two or more changes of social worker in 2015/16 and 2016/17. Repeated social work instability was lower in Central Bedfordshire at 5.6% (304 children) as compared to the national average of 6.4% (38,906 children) but higher than the East of England average of 3.4% (2,131 children). Unlike in the single year instability rate data, no subgroups, such as differences in social work stability for particular ages of looked after children, were noted by the Children's Commissioner in the data for repeated social work instability in Central Bedfordshire.

## Conclusions

15. Social Workers are choosing to come and work in Central Bedfordshire and stay working here. Good staff satisfaction, as indicated in the recent Organisational Health Check, is high and this is reflected in the declining vacancy rates and reduced use of agency staff across the service as a

whole. This is despite the fact that social work recruitment is intensely challenging in a significant number of other local authorities, locally and nationally.

16. Effective recruitment and retention of social workers has contributed to our overall social stability rates being better than the national average. Performance stability in respect of 5-15 year olds was better than the national and eastern region averages. However, we aspire to high performance across all age ranges and comparative measures. The Children's Commissioner Report has supported us to concentrate our attention in particular areas of our work. We are committed to addressing this issue over the next twelve months. This will include regular review of our recruitment and retention practice.

### **Council Priorities**

17. Protecting the vulnerable
18. Improving wellbeing
19. Creating stronger communities
20. A more efficient and responsive Council

### **Corporate Implications**

21. None

### **Legal Implications**

22. The report does not have specific legal implications. However, the Council has a statutory obligation towards its looked after children and this report provides information as to how some of those obligations are being met.

### **Financial and Risk Implications**

23. This report does not have specific financial implications. However, recruitment and retention of social workers costs less than use of agency so contributes to good budget management.

### **Equalities Implications**

24. 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. Ensuring that looked after children are provided with stable relationships with their social workers enables Central Bedfordshire Council to achieve better outcomes for children and young people who are additionally vulnerable.

**Recommendations**

25. Social Worker churn, whilst moderate, is an area we continue to work hard to address. We will review and develop the recruitment and retention programme for social workers, so that looked after children and young people have good social work stability in Central Bedfordshire.

**Appendices**

26. Children's Commissioner Stability Index August 2018

**Background Papers**

27. None

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**Central Bedfordshire Council**

**Corporate Parenting Panel**

25 October 2018

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**FOSTER CARERS LOAN SCHEME REPORT**

Report of: Cllr Steven Dixon, Executive Member for Families, Education and Children and Lead Member for Childrens Services

[steven.dixon@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:steven.dixon@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Responsible Director(s): Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services,  
([Sue.Harrison@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Sue.Harrison@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk))

**This report relates to a Key Decision**

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**Purpose of this report**

1. This document defines the scheme for the provision of an interest-free loan to adoptive/fostering households, who wish to extend or convert their homes in order to offer a wider range or number of placements to CBC children in care.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked for:**

1. **Consideration and Approval of the draft scheme.**

**Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations**

Plan is for the scheme to go to Overview and Scrutiny on November 20<sup>th</sup> 2018

**Background**

2. The Local Authority has a duty to provide sufficient accommodation for looked after children.
3. Central Bedfordshire Council want to enable foster carers and adopters to alter or adapt their homes, or in some circumstances to obtain a larger home in order to increase their capacity to accommodate looked after children locally and in particular to provide for additional capacity to secure permanence for sibling groups.

4. It is expected that introducing a scheme on loans for carers will support the Local Authority in respect of the medium-term efficiency savings needed. This is because we still have a high volume of children placed in high cost IFA/residential placements. Some of these children may be placed due to a lack of available rooms with our in-house/Family and Friends carers.
5. The average weekly cost of an IFA placement is £778.34, and the average weekly cost of an in-house placement is £421.47. Replacing any of the external placements with an in house provision will generate considerable savings to the local authority whilst meeting the needs of our children.
6. Carers may want to borrow small amounts of money i.e. £5k to £10k to divide a room, or larger amounts i.e. £25k/£30k to have say ,a loft conversion. Initially a tranche of £100k has been proposed for this scheme. If this proves to be successful this amount could be increased in the future. This initial amount would allow for at least 3 loft conversions or 10/20 room dividers which would obviously increase potential savings to the Local Authority regarding IFA placement costs. Repayment of the funding loan is to be made via a deduction from the foster carer fees payable by the Council to the foster carer over an agreed period of time to be stated in the contract, but to be no longer than 5 years or as an average 5 years or otherwise agreed. The deduction will be made automatically, from the foster carers fee. The actual length of the loan repayment will be based on the circumstances of the individual. For the avoidance of doubt no deductions will be made from the fostering allowance itself as that money is provided to pay for the cost of caring for the child in placement. Repayments and timescales will be agreed in advance of loan payment, all of which will be clearly detailed within the loan contract that will be drawn up between the foster carer and CBC.
7. Offering foster carers interest free loans of up to five years provides another incentive for Central Bedfordshire foster carers which they would not have if approved with an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA). Similar schemes are in operation in a number of Local Authorities.

#### **Issues**

8. The Corporate Parenting Service currently do not have funding to support this scheme.

#### **Reason/s for decision**

9. Not applicable

### Reason for urgency

10. Not applicable.

### Council Priorities

- Children and Families first
- Working as One Team close to the community
- Being a well-managed Service and providing great public care.
- Protecting the Vulnerable: improving wellbeing.
- A more efficient and responsive Council.

### Legal Implications

11. The Local Authority has a duty to provide sufficient accommodation for looked after children as set out in Section 22G of the Children Act 1989. It requires local authorities to take strategic action in respect of the children they look after and for whom it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation within their local authority area. In these circumstances, Section 22G requires local authorities, so far as is reasonably practicable to ensure that there is sufficient accommodation for those children that meets their needs.
12. The power to provide funding for home extensions is contained in the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 ('the Order'). Article 3 of the Order states that for the purpose of improving living conditions in their area, a local housing authority may provide, directly or indirectly, assistance to any person for the purpose of enabling him to adapt or improve living accommodation (whether by alteration, conversion or enlargement, by the installation of any thing or injection of any substance or otherwise).
13. Article 4 of the Order provides that a local housing authority may not exercise the power conferred by article 3 in any case unless—
  - a) they have adopted a scheme for the provision of assistance under that article;
  - b) they have given public notice of the adoption of the scheme;
  - c) they have secured that—
    - (i) a document in which the scheme is set out in full is available for inspection, free of charge, at their principal office at all reasonable times; and

- (ii) copies of a document containing a summary of the scheme may be obtained by post (on payment, where a reasonable charge is made, of the amount of the charge); and
  - d) the power is exercised in that case in accordance with that scheme.
14. Article 5 of the Order contains miscellaneous protective provisions governing the arrangement.

### **Financial and Risk Implications**

15. The Corporate Parenting Service does not currently have funding to support this scheme; it is proposed to treat these loans as a balance sheet item (creates a debtor) and to offset this with the monthly repayment. This has nil impact on the general fund so long as the debt is repaid.
16. This scheme will save Central Bedfordshire Council ongoing recurring costs as it will enable in-house foster carers to care for more children with reliance on more expensive I.F.A.'s – see section 1.
17. There is a risk of non-payment of the loan, however we will look to mitigate the risk by ensuring that foster carers can meet the repayment even if they do not have a child currently in placement (see 2.1 of the scheme).

### **Equalities Implications**

18. 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. This proposal will help accommodate looked after children locally and in particular provide for additional capacity to secure permanence for sibling groups.

### **Conclusion and next Steps**

19. Introducing a scheme to allow carers to access loans for extensions and adaptations to their homes will support the Local Authority in meeting its efficiency requirements. It provides a further incentive for foster carers to choose to foster for Central Bedfordshire Council

20. **Recommendation**

For the Corporate Parenting Panel to consider and approve the draft scheme.

**Appendices**

Appendix A: Foster Carers Loans Scheme

Appendix 1: Foster Carer Funding for Building Works Application Form

Appendix 2: Examples of Need

**Background Papers**

None

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## Appendix A

### Foster Carers Loan Scheme

#### 1. Introduction

##### 1.1. Background

As part of Children's Service Transformation Programme at Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) the Fostering Service have the following objectives:

- Increase the number of CBC foster carers vs Independent Foster Agency IFA's
- Increase CBC's ability to place looked after children and young people with CBC foster carers, particularly within the Central Bedfordshire area. This approach is based on the requirement to obtain best value and is considered to be a better use of resources rather than looked after children and young people being placed in Independent Foster Agency (IFA) carers and Independent Residential Care Homes, unless the individual's needs indicate otherwise.

One way to achieve the project objectives stated above is to expand the accommodation to the homes of qualifying foster carers thus increasing the number of placements that are offered by any fostering household.

Qualifying carers will sign up to a legally binding arrangement whereby CBC will provide an interest-free loan to a maximum amount, for the construction of an extension, adaptation or loft conversion (building works), providing one or more bedrooms and associated living space.

It is important that a coherent programme of delivery underpinned by a clear and consistently applied scheme is developed. This document will define the scheme for the provision of an interest-free loan to foster carers, who wish to extend or convert their homes in order to offer wider placements to CBC children in care.

#### 2. Scheme

##### 2.1. Framework

To promote and support enduring solutions for children in care, CBC are able to provide an interest-free loan to support the costs of building works to foster carers homes. This service will apply where the work will enable the child(ren) to have a foster placement which meets the requirements of their care plan.

##### 2.2. Process overview

Where a foster carer applies for building works that will help them to continue to care for, or offer increased/wider placements for CBC children, an initial scoping exercise will be undertaken by the Supervising Social Worker to ensure that they meet the eligibility criteria. This will include ensuring the foster carer has the correct approval to care for the proposed number/ages of children etc. A proposal will then need to be submitted by the foster carer to the Fostering Team Manager. The Fostering Manager will review the proposal and write a short report indicating whether they agree in principle or reject the proposal and, if agreed in principle, will submit the report to the Resource Panel. Any agreement in principle by the FST Manager is not binding on the Council and should not be relied upon by the foster carer. The Resource Panel

will make the final decision and will need to establish if the foster carer meets the criteria set out in paragraph 2.4. The final decision on the application including how much funding will be offered to the foster carer will be made by the Resource Panel ensuring that it does not exceed the following costs (excluding VAT):

Type of Accommodation Charge	Estimated cost
1 bed extension/adaptation	£30,000
2 bed extension/adaptation	£40,000
1 bed loft/garage extension/adaptation	£25,000
2 bed loft/garage conversion/adaptation	£30,000

The proposal for funding for works to properties under this scheme is to include the following

- Written request from the foster carer and a report from the Fostering Social Worker/Manager (Appendix 1). The report should provide an overview of the reasons for the application, how the applicant meets the criteria and plans for the proposed work to be carried out
- The plans containing the proposed work will need to include all major items.
- The foster carer will need to provide three work quotations from experienced builders (at this stage the plans can be drawn up by a builder as a guide as to what is possible)

As soon as possible, the Council's legal service should be asked to check the title to the property to establish whether it is freehold or leasehold/shared ownership and also for: charges, restrictions, covenants or any entries that would prevent or hinder the Council placing a charge to secure the loan. It is in the interests of both the applicant and the Council to avoid wasting time and resources if there are serious legal barriers to such a proposal. A valuation of the property should also be undertaken to ascertain whether there is sufficient equity to repay the loan if ever needed.

This quotation aspect will be undertaken by Resources Team ideally needs to be approved by Assets to ensure the building Regulations are adhered to. If they agree then the Resource Panel approves the building works proposal and agrees the funding amount to be given, the foster carer will be notified and can commission the builder for the building works. The funding will not be released until the contract has been signed and returned by the foster carer to CBC and all required consents have been obtained, including, but not limited to, planning, landlord, shared owner, mortgagee. Once the contract is signed and returned, the Council's Resource and Placement Team will be responsible for ensuring that the funding amount is paid to the contracted builder – as staged payments – as and when work is completed.



The funding amount will depend on the work being proposed as stated in the lowest compliant quotation that ensures value for money and has a proven track record.

Repayment of the funding loan is to be made via a deduction from the foster carer fees payable by the Council to the foster carer over an agreed period of time to be stated in the contract to be no longer than an average of 5 years unless otherwise agreed. The deduction will be made automatically, from the foster carers fee. For the avoidance of doubt no deductions will be made from the fostering allowance itself as that money is provided to pay for the cost of caring for the child in placement. Repayments and timescales will be agreed in advance of loan payment, all of which will be clearly detailed within the loan contract that will be drawn up between the foster carer and CBC.

The foster carers will be expected to begin building works at the earliest opportunity. If after 90 days no building work or planning has begun, or no plans have been made for building works to start, then agreement for the funding will be withdrawn. No funding will be released until the commencement of building work.

A legal charge on the foster carers' property must be in place before any payment is made to the builder.

If the works are abandoned by the builders, then the foster carer will be given 90 days to source an alternative builder. The foster carer will need to go through the process again of collecting three quotes and informing the Fostering Manager before a final decision is made on a builder.

Foster carers that apply for and are granted funding for building works will be expected to provide their services as a CBC foster carer for a period of no less than 5 years. If a foster carer is de-registered or resigns during this time, full re-payment of the loan amounts outstanding will be required within 6 months of de-registration/ resignation. **The outstanding amount will accrue interest at the Bank of England bank base rate in force at the time and will be added to the loan which must be repaid in full within 6 months. If the loan is not repaid within 6 months, then interest will continue to accrue at 1% above the Bank of England base rate until the loan is repaid in full. The Council will consider enforcing its charge by way of an order for sale in the event the loan is not repaid within 12 months.**

As above, a charge will be placed upon the foster carer's property to secure the loan monies. The foster carer's own legal costs for this process will be borne by the foster carer. The Council's legal costs will be added to the loan amount, (legal costs will also be applied when the charge is taken off the property). If the foster carer moves to a new house CBC will recover the loan amount in full, from the sale of the property.

Contracts will be drawn up by legal services to include the loan agreement to cover de-registration, resignation or carers moving to a new house.



If the foster carer is successful in their application for funding it will be their responsibility to ensure the following:

- Awareness of any restrictive covenants in the deeds to the property
- Awareness of any known planning issues
- The contracting of an experienced builder and architect services surveyor. The builder and architect must be a member of their recognised trade/professional body and approved by the Council.
- Seeking building control and other approvals
- Mortgagee approval and relevant consents and associated costs
- Joint owners approval and consents (together with relevant legal advice)
- The obtaining of 3 quotes for the required building works.

[Note - If there is a joint-owner both must deal with the legal process as both become a party to the charge and the obligations and responsibilities for repayment.]

### 2.3 Proposal

The proposal from the foster carer and Fostering Manager will need to demonstrate that the placement falls within one of the priority groups as defined in paragraph 2.5 or that the placement is a long-term placement.

### 2.4 Criteria

The eligibility for an interest free loan for building works under this Scheme only applies to home owners and in most cases freehold owners only. In order for the foster carer to be eligible for the funding they must also meet the following criteria:

- The foster carer must have provided at least 12 months of foster care for CBC's children and young people and had a positive annual review
- There has been no standard of care issues within the last 12 months
- The foster carer is willing to take "hard to place" children (e.g. teenagers, sibling groups, those with challenging behaviours, or complex disability needs)
- Or
- The works will enable a child to have a long term/permanent placement with that family which could not otherwise be possible.

2.4.1 Loans under this Scheme will not be available for those not meeting the criteria set out above

### 2.5 Priority

In order to prioritise funding, the following priorities apply:

- **Priority 1**- Foster carers who can offer placements to:
  - o Sibling groups
  - o Children aged 12 years old and above
  - o Permanent placements
- **Priority 2**-Foster carers who can offer placements to:
  - o 5 - 9-year olds

- **Priority 3** - Foster carers who can offer placements to:
  - o Under 5-year olds

Applications will be considered in time order (a first come basis) then in the priority order above (i.e. all applications being considered at the same time will be ranked according to priority and those in Priority 1 will be considered first etc). Once the allocation is used there will be no further commitments during the year subject to additional funding being provided.

## 2.6. Information required in support of an application

The proposal must include the following information:

- Legal ownership of the premises via up to date Land Registry documentation together with the consent of any mortgagee or other chargeholder, and any consent form Landlords/shared equity owners etc to be obtained and supplied by the applicant, or their solicitor or by the Council's legal services at the applicant's cost.
- An outline of works to be conducted is required. This needs to cover all known major items as it will be used for setting the budget. A copy of the plans that have been drawn up by a builder will also need to be included.
- Confirmation that once the building works are complete the property will conform to the appropriate Building Regulations, health and safety legislation and all other appropriate legislation
- Evidence that consultation with building control has taken place together with any outcome
- Quotation of costs -three quotations from approved builders is required.
- Financial evidence that the foster carer is able to make repayments from an additional source in the event that they do not have a foster placement for some time through no fault of their own and remain available and willing to take placements (*see paragraphs 2.3.8.1 and 2.3.8.2 for more information*). This evidence will need to include:
  - o Last 3 months bank statements
  - o List of incomings and outgoings
  - o Proof of carer income i.e. payslips
  - o Recent credit check (Credit checks can be conducted online free of charge, recommended site <https://www.noddle.co.uk/>)

## 2.7 Approval process

The Fostering Manager, where necessary, will consult with finance, building control, asset and other departments in relation to risk and other factors to form a decision as to the appropriateness of the proposal and implementation. Legal Services should be consulted at an early stage to ensure the property is suitable for a legal charge. The proposal will then be taken to the Resource Panel for approval of funding. If

funding is agreed, the Fostering Manager will write to the foster carer to advise of the decision within 14 days.

1. Whether the proposal is agreed or not
2. If agreed, the agreed loan amount, when available and repayment requirements and other information that is required
3. If applicable, reasons for agreeing a lower level of loan than applied for
4. If not agreed, reasons for refusal of the loan

To ensure consistency of decision making and loans, foster carers should submit all requests and proposals for loans for building works through the Fostering Manager using the application template in the Appendix to this Scheme. If agreed in principle the Fostering Manager will then submit to the Resource Panel for review and a final decision as detailed within this Scheme.

2.8. Consideration will be taken with all relevant stakeholders within the Council once the Scheme has been approved.

## 2.9 **Contracts**

A contract will be provided by the Council's solicitors between the Council and the foster carer and any other owners of the property in order to regulate the funding arrangement, stipulate what the funding is being provided for, the level of funding and the repayment arrangements.

Foster carers that apply for and are granted funding for building works will be expected to provide their services as a Central Bedfordshire Council foster carer for a period of no less than 5 years. If a foster carer chooses to resign, or their approval terminated during the 5-year period, then a full repayment of outstanding amounts under the loan will be required within 6 months of their resignation, de-registration or termination. The outstanding amount will accrue interest at the Bank of England current bank base rate in force at the time and will be added to the loan. If the loan is not repaid within 6 months, then interest will continue to accrue at 1% above the Bank of England base rate until the loan is repaid in full. The Council will consider enforcing its charge by way of an order for sale in the event the loan is not repaid within 12 months.

2.10 If a foster carer refuses 3 consecutive placements without an acceptable explanation as to why, then full repayment of outstanding amounts under the loan will be required within 6 months of the 3<sup>rd</sup> refusal with interest accruing at the Bank of England current bank base rate in force at the time. If the loan is not repaid within 6 months of the 3<sup>rd</sup> refusal, then interest will continue to accrue at 1% above the Bank of England base rate until the loan is repaid in full. The Council will consider enforcing its charge by way of an order for sale in the event the loan is not repaid within 12 months.

Repayments will be calculated in relation to the loan amount and the agreed repayment term. Please see below an example of sliding scale repayments:



**Monthly Repayments**  
**Amount of Loan**  
**Repayment Period (Months)**

Amount of Loan	Repayment Period (Months)	Amount Payable (Monthly)
£25,000	12	£2,084
	24	£1,042
	36	£695
	48	£521
	60	£417
£30,000	12	£2,500
	24	£1,250
	36	£834
	48	£625
	60	£500
The above is based on various loan amounts and payments over 1 to 5 years. In some circumstances an adjustment to the repayment period will be considered.		

**2.11 How will repayments be made**

Repayments will be made by deducting from the foster carers fee which is £100 per week – Tier 1 or £175 per week - Tier 2. If the foster carer is without a foster placement, which could be for a number of weeks or months, they must ensure that they have sufficient income available to meet the monthly repayments of the loan in these circumstances. Repayments should be paid to CBC by direct debit.

In addition, they will be advised to consider taking out either short-term or long-term income protection in the event that they are unable to make repayments for any reason i.e. accident or sickness. Taking out such protection may be helpful for someone who wants to cover their monthly income, so they do not fall behind with monthly outgoings should they be unable to work. They will be advised to seek independent advice if they are unsure.

**2.12 What happens if a foster carer cannot afford to make any repayments?**

If a foster carer has missed 2 or more monthly repayments, then the Accounts Receivable team will consider taking the appropriate action to reclaim the outstanding balance of the loan in full. This may include the commencement of legal proceedings for repayment of the loan amount outstanding or for an order for sale under the legal charge. Such action will incur further costs and interest which will be payable by the foster carer.

*Any concerns about the building works or the loan (including repayment) should be raised with the supervising social worker as soon as possible in order to discuss the situation and avoid unnecessary action. In exceptional circumstances such as illness or redundancy a revised payment plan or different foster care placements may be considered.*

**2.13 Legal considerations**

The legal charge on the Property will need to be executed by all joint owners and will require the consent of any lender/mortgagee or charge holder. The Applicant would be responsible for obtaining the consent of any chargeholder.

Where a property is already mortgaged an assessment would need to be made of whether there is sufficient equity remaining in the property for security for the Council's charge. This would be by the Applicant obtaining a statement of the amount outstanding on existing mortgages and a reliable valuation of the property.

Only freehold properties would be eligible. Leasehold properties and shared ownership properties are problematic. Structural changes would need consent of the freeholder and extensions would be likely to go beyond the existing demise. Even if the landlord/shared owner agreed to the works they would also benefit from the works but would be unlikely to agree to encumber their interest with the Council's charge.

**APPENDICES:**

Appendix 1: Foster Carer Funding for Building Works Application Form

Appendix 2: Examples of Need



**Appendix 1:**

**Foster Carer Section**

*(To be completed by the fostering household applying for funding. Once this and the supervising social worker section has been completed, it will be submitted to the Fostering Team Manager)*

<b>1. Personal details of the fostering household applying for funding:</b>					
1.1	First Name (s):				
1.2	Surname (s):				
1.3	Address				
1.4	Supervising Social Worker				
<b>2</b>	<b>Criteria Questions</b>				
2.1	<b>What building works are you requesting funding for?</b> <i>(Loft conversion, extension or other? Please specify.)</i>				
2.2	<b>What is your reason for requesting funding?</b> <i>(e.g. additional space for hard to place children, to enable a child to have a long term/permanent placement which would not be otherwise possible. Please provide details if possible)</i>				
2.3	<b>How long have you been a foster carer with CBC</b>	<b>Years</b>		<b>Months</b>	
2.4	<b>What placements are you able to/will you be able to offer to CBC Children</b>	<b>Now</b>		<b>With Funding</b>	
		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
	Siblings				
	Children aged 12 and over				
	Children aged 5-9				
	Children under the age of 5				
	Permanent Placement				



**Central Bedfordshire Council  
Building Work Funding Application Form**

2.5	<p><b>Does your Fostering approval categories cover the prepared placements?</b> If not, what Fostering Panel will this be presented to, to address any variations.</p>	
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**Please ensure that you enclose all of the following information as part of your application for funding.**

Supporting Documentation	Attached/comment
Official Copies of the Title to your property from the Land Registry – Register and Title Plan if registered. If unregistered the original deeds or certified copies.	
An outline of the works to be conducted <i>(This needs to cover all known major items)</i>	
Copy of the plans that have been drawn up by a builder <i>(at this stage the plans can be drawn up by a builder as a guide to what is possible)</i>	
Estimate of costs (from 3 reputable builders)	
Confirmation that once the conversion/extension is complete that the property will conform to the Standards set out in the H & S and Building Regulations Control	
Last 3 months bank statements	
List of incomings and outgoings	
Proof of household income (i.e. payslips)	

**Declaration**

I hereby agree that an amount of £100 per week or £175 per week (delete as applicable) can be deducted from my foster carer fee for the repayment of the loan.

Name: (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



<b>Social Worker Report</b>		
<b>1. Reason for funding request:</b> <i>(State whether the funding is for a loft conversion, extension or other – give details)</i>		
<b>2. State if the applicant(s) meet the relevant criteria?</b>		
Criteria	Yes/No	Any additional information that may support the application
3.1	Approved foster carers	
3.2	Has there been any standard of care issues within the last 18 months?	
3.3	Is the fostering household willing to take 'difficult to place' children? (E.g. teenagers, sibling groups, those with challenging behaviours)	
3.4	Will the works enable a child to have a long term/permanent placement with that family that would not otherwise be possible?	
<b>3. Which priority do the applicants(s) sit within? Delete as applicable</b>		
	<b>Priority Information</b> <b>Foster Carers that can offer placements to:</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>
One	Sibling Groups	
	Children over the age of 11	
	Permanent Placements	
Two	5-9 Year olds	
Three	Under 5 year olds	
<b>4. Has the following information been included in the applicant(s) application?</b>		
	<b>Information</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>
5.1	Confirmation from the Council's Legal Service that there is nothing on the property title to prevent the Council registering a charge to protect the loan. [This should be carried out at the beginning of the process]	



**Central Bedfordshire Council**  
**Building Work Funding Application Form**

	(ii) Confirmation of consent from any existing mortgage lender or chargeholder and any landlord or shared equity owner	
5.2	An outline of the works to be conducted <i>(This needs to cover all known major items)</i>	
5.3	Copy of the plans that have been drawn up by a builder <i>(at this stage the plans can be drawn up by a builder as a guide to what is possible)</i>	
5.4	Estimate of costs (from 3 reputable builders)	
5.6	Confirmation that once the conversion/extension is complete that the property will conform to the Standards set out in the H & S and Building Regulations Control	
5.7	Last 3 months bank statements	
5.8	List of incomings and outgoings	
5.9	Proof of household income (i.e. payslips)	
6.	Has the foster carers approval to care for additional children or children on a permanent basis been presented to Fostering Panel (this will be required before proceeding with the application.	
7.	<b>Recommendation of Social Worker:</b> <b>Name:</b>	

**Declaration**

I hereby verify that I have checked the application and I am satisfied that the applicant(s) fit the criteria for the required loan.

Name: (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



Central Bedfordshire Council  
Building Work Funding Application Form

Recommendation of Fostering Manager

(In liaison with the Practice Manager)

1.	<b>Do you recommend the applicant(s) is/are suitable candidates to receive funding?</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>
	<b>Notes:</b>	
2.	<b>Does the applicant(s) have the relevant fostering approval to proceed?</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>
	<b>Notes</b>	
3.	<b>What is the recommended funding budget?</b>	<b>£</b>
	<b>Notes:</b>	

I confirm that I have checked the application and I am satisfied that the applicant(s) fit the criteria for the required loan.

Name: (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Date of Resource Panel Application:</b>	
<b>Notes:</b>	
<b>Decision of Resource Panel:</b>	<b>Agreed / Declined</b>
<b>Notes:</b>	

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**Appendix 2.****Foster Carer Loans Scheme – Examples of Need**

## Examples 1:

One of our current foster carers is keen to provide care for a sibling group of 3 (her current accommodation means she can only take 2). If we were to be able to offer her an interest free loan she would happily extend her property to accommodate a further child. This would not only mean she could provide an additional placement, but it would also allow her to look after a larger sibling group which would be a valuable resource to the department. Sibling groups are always difficult to accommodate as not many carers have 3 free bedrooms empty and available for fostering. This means that often children are split up from their siblings or, when separation is not suitable, the children are placed together in external more expensive placements. The difference in cost of an in-house placement for 3 children compared to an IFA is significant. An in-house placement for a sibling group of 3 children aged 5-10 would cost between £788 - £1,000 a week compared to £2,400 a week in an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA). Therefore, offering a free interest loan to this foster carer would be an invest to save making a minimum saving of £1,300 per week whilst the carer repays her loan.

**Financial Implications:**

- 5-year-old coming into care until 18<sup>th</sup> Birthday = 13 years.
- **In House placement costs** £379 per week (based on average costs) \* 52 = £19,708 \* 13 years = £256,204
- **IFA placement costs** £800 per week (based on average costs) \* 52 = £41,600 \* 13 years = £540,800

**Savings if we can offer a loan for an extra bedroom over the 13 years = £284,596.**

## Example 2:

Another current example we have is regarding a couple Family and Friends Foster Carers who care for a baby from their extended family. The carers currently live in a 3 bedroomed home with their 2 children aged 12 and 8. In order to keep the baby within its family the carers need financial support to install a partition in one of the bedrooms so that each child can have their own room. Initially the baby has been sharing with the 8-year-old, however this has had a significant impact on him as he has lost his privacy and space and his mother can no longer spend time reading him a bedtime story in bed in case they wake the baby. Also, this arrangement is not sustainable long term.

The carers are providing excellent care to the baby and wish to care for him on a long-term basis, but their accommodation doesn't support this or meet the baby or

**Central Bedfordshire Council  
Foster Carers Loan Scheme**

carers son's needs. They are on a low income and cannot afford to pay for the work to be completed, however if they were to be provided with an interest free loan this would allow for the work to be done.

This would be a great outcome for this baby who would be able to remain living within his extended family on a permanent basis.

On this example, the cost incurred by the Local Authority would be the cost of paying the foster carers' allowance until he reaches his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday as we would do for any other child who is placed with Foster Carers. However, the outcome for the child would be better as he would remain to live with his family promoting his identity, sense of belonging and attachment, which in turn will contribute to a stable placement, reduce the risk of break down and the need of more expensive placements down the line.

This option is also in the best interest of the child as it will allow him to stay with the family rather than being adopted when there are family who are able and willing to offer him a forever family

Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

25 OCTOBER 2018

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**Agency Report Quarter 1 Fostering 1 April - 30 June 2018**

Report of: (Cllr Steven Dixon, Executive Member for Social Care and Housing ([steven.dixon@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:steven.dixon@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)))

Advising Officer(s): Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services, ([Sue.Harrison@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Sue.Harrison@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)) and Annie Craig, Practice Manager, Fostering Team ([annie.craig@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:annie.craig@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk))

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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 to outline the activities in the Fostering Service in order for members to monitor and feedback on the quality and performance of the Service.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

1. Consider and note the Fostering Agency Quarter 1 Report

**Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations**

2. This report has not been to nor is planned to go to Overview and Scrutiny as no recommendations/decisions are required. Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to consider and note the Fostering Agency Quarter 1 report.

**Executive Summary**

3. 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. This report, therefore, focuses on the work undertaken in the Fostering Service during the first quarter of the financial year 2018/2019 (1 April – 30 June 2018). It focuses on the recruitment, assessment, approval and training of foster carers. It also reports on any Ofsted notifications, allegations, complaints or compliments received regarding foster carers or the Service as a whole.

### **Recruitment of Foster Carers**

4. During this quarter a variety of recruitment activities and events took place in line with the Fostering Services Recruitment Strategy which included adverts on the back of buses, roundabout signs, a Net Native campaign on Facebook, lamppost adverts and various press releases and tweets and posts on CBC Twitter and Facebook.
5. As a result of the recruitment that took place during this period we received a total of 27 enquiries; 7 in April; 14 in May and 6 in June (this is 6 less than in the last quarter). There were 18 Initial Visits during this period: 4 in April; 10 in May and 4 in June (this is the same as in the last quarter). There were 12 application forms received during this period: 3 in April; 5 in May and 4 in June (this is 1 more than in the previous quarter). The best form of recruitment during this period was through a Net Native advert (66 enquiries) followed by a Facebook advert re PACE fostering (34 enquiries) followed by the CBC website (28 enquiries).

### **Assessments**

6. As of the 30 June 2018 there were a total of 16 assessments in progress:
  - 12 career carers (which included 2 PACE carers and 1 IFA transfer),
  - 2 Regulation 24s (emergency family and friends)
  - 2 Supported Lodgings assessments.
7. In addition to the 12 ongoing assessments, 2 new career were approved during this quarter
8. The recruitment targets set for 2018/19 is to recruit 15 new career carers and we are on track to be meeting this target depending on the outcomes of the current assessments

### **Resignations/Termination of Approvals**

9. During this quarter, 1 foster carer's approval was terminated by CBC due to standards of care and 3 foster carers resigned, 2 because they re-located and 1 because the carer was granted a Special Guardianship Order for the child in their care.

### **Carer/LAC Data**

10. As of the 30 June 2018 the Fostering Agency had a total of 101 fostering households (compared to 102 in the previous quarter), 82 of these were career carers.
11. In relation to the ethnicity of foster carers, there is a fair match of ethnicity with foster carers broadly reflecting the ethnicity of our children in care.

<b>Ethnicity</b>		
<i><b>Ethnicity</b></i>	<i><b>Foster Carers</b></i>	<i><b>Looked After Children</b></i>
White	89% (156)	75.6% (235)
Dual Heritage	1% (1)	6.8% (21)
Black or Black British	6% (11)	4.5% (14)
Asian	4% (7)	3.5% (11)
White Gypsy/Traveller	/	1.9% (6)
Other	/	7.4% (23)
Not known	/	0.3% (1)
	<b>100% (175)</b>	<b>100% (311)</b>

12. On 30 June 2018 there were a total of 136 children (62%) placed with in-house foster carers compared to 131 in the previous quarter.

13. 85 children (38%) were placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) which is the same at the end of the previous quarter.

### **Referrals/Placements**

14. During this quarter there were 25 new fostering placements made. This is an increase of 8 new placements compared to the last quarter.

15. The short term placement stability continues to remain good. This is defined as children looked after with three or more placements during the previous twelve months (national performance indicator). In central Bedfordshire our children are stable in their placements and only 8% had 3 or more moves in the last 12 months. This compares favourably with statistical neighbours at 11.2% and national average at 10% and national figures

16. Long term placement stability also remains strong. This is defined by the percentage of children looked after aged under 16 who have been in the same placement for at least 2 years. During the first quarter of the year we exceeded our target of 77% and 81% of our children were stable in their placement for at least 2 years. This is well above statistical neighbours (67.9%) and national average (70%)

### **Special Guardianship Orders**

17. As of the 30 June 2018 there were 148 Special Guardianship Orders in place (compared to 143 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.

18. The Fostering Service continues to work with a small cohort of families who contact the service 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.

### **Private Fostering**

19. At the end of June 2018, the fostering service was supporting 2 private fostering households who were looking after 2 children.

### **Training**

20. During this quarter foster carers accessed a wide range of training opportunities to help them develop their knowledge and skills. The Fostering Service provided 14 specialist in-house training courses which included:

- Children who go missing,
- Sexual exploitation, including Internet Safety and digital safeguarding;
- Cultural Competence

21. 1 carer attended training from the Early Years and multi-agency programme, this was on the Vulnerabilities of mental health when safeguarding children.

22. 54 foster carers also accessed e-learning, which included:

- Equality and Diversity;
- Self harm and suicidal thoughts in children;
- Understanding pathways to extremism and the prevent programme.

23. As of the 30 June 2018 there was only 1 fostering household that was overdue in completing their mandatory Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD's) in the required timescale. The supervising social worker and the Marketing, Recruitment and Training Support Officer were providing additional support to help the carers achieve the standards.

### **Ofsted Notifications**

24. 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.

25. During this period there were no required notifications.

### **Allegations**

26. During this period there was 1 allegation made, against a CBC foster carer, of inappropriate parenting which did not warrant a formal investigation but was dealt with by the fostering service as a concern.

### **Complaints**

27. During this period, there was 1 complaint made by a foster carer on behalf of a child in their care regarding her stay in respite care. This was partially upheld and remedial action was taken to address the areas of the complaint that were upheld.

### **Compliments**

28. During this period the fostering service received 7 compliments from foster carers either about the support they had received or on services provided.

### **Annual Budget**

29. For the year 2018/2019 the Fostering Service within Children's Services had an annual budget of £1,092,557 for the running of the service, this excludes fees/allowances paid to foster carers.

### **Reporting to Members – Legal Requirements**

30. 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**

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

### **Staffing**

32. 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 2 new social workers joined the service and a first year social work student joined the service for a 70 day placement.

### **Council Priorities**

33. Children and Families First.

34. Working as One Team close to our community.

35. Being great Corporate Parents to children in care and care leavers – much more than care.

36. Being a well-managed service and providing great public care.

### **Corporate Implications**

37. Not applicable.

### **Legal Implications**

38. This report provides updating information to allow consideration of the activities of the Fostering Agency in the previous quarter as required by legislation, there are no further legal implications.

### **Financial and Risk Implications**

39. The report is an update on the fostering service and does not have financial implications.

### **Equalities Implications**

40. 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 report highlights ongoing efforts to recruit foster carers from diverse backgrounds and to provide training and development in relation to equality issues.

### **Implications of Work Programming**

41. The 4 quarter reports for fostering feed into an annual report which is then presented to Overview and Scrutiny along with the Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy.

### **Conclusion and next Steps**

42. The Fostering Service has met its recruitment targets for the past 4 years and it is on track to be meeting the ambitious target of recruiting 15 career carers during the current year.

43. As of 30 June 2018, 62% of children were placed with in house foster carers compared to 38% with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's).

44. Our children continue to live in stable placements and both short and long-term placement stability is strong.

45. The stability and quality of placements our foster carers offer is evidenced also by the fact that during this period there has only been one complaint and one allegation, no OFSTED notifications and no fragile placements/disruption meetings were required

46. Our Foster Carers are consistently attending core training to develop their skills and knowledge which means they are in a better position to support the children in their care.

47. In conclusion this has been a positive first quarter for the Service. Although this is only the first quarter the service is either meeting its current targets or on course to meet them by the end of the financial year. The performance and available data for the service give a good indication that foster carers are providing a high standard of care to the children placed with them, that children are well matched and supported in local resources and that outcomes for them are good.

### **Appendices**

48. None.

### **Background Papers**

49. None.

Report author:

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# Regional Adoption Agency

October 2018

# National Context

In 2015, DfE launched the Regionalising Adoption programme, encouraging all LAs to work with other LAs and voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs) to regionalise their adoption services, and consider alternative delivery models.

This followed a policy push by the previous administration to improve the timeliness and level of adoption. Alongside reforms to adopter recruitment and support, and to the process for moving children through the system in readiness for adoption, grants were provided to both LAs and VAAs.

Many RAAs are working towards an LA-hosted model which involves a LA delivering the RAA on behalf of other LAs without the establishment of a new entity.

As of May 2018 there were 10 operational RAAs incorporating 49 LAs. The projects under development cover a total of 90 LAs, leaving only 13 LAs which are not part of an RAA.

# National Context cont.

The aim is for RAAs to offer greater scale and consistency across adopter recruitment, matching and support to improve the extent and timeliness of adoption for children where it is in their best interest. In practice this means integrated delivery of these functions across a number of, under a single brand and management structure, and by a single organisation. The DfE have seven criteria for forming an RAA:

- Single line of accountability
- Core functions are transferred to the RAA
- Pan-regional approach
- Recruitment, support and matching
- Management responsibility
- Pooled funding
- Partnership with the voluntary sector.

# Central East RAA

- Under an initial development led by Coram, Central East RAA was made up of Central Bedfordshire, Bedford, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk.
- Until January 2017 development was led by Coram and focused on establishing best practice across the region through a hub and an appraisal of potential contractual/ legal arrangements.
- In June 2017 Central Bedfordshire took on the lead role and worked with other LAs to develop an Outline Business Case to support an LA hosted model completed in October 2017. After considering the outline business case it was decided that Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire would explore other options.
- Central Bedfordshire, Bedford Borough and Milton Keynes worked together with the DFE to prepare a full Business Case for an RAA hosted by Central Bedfordshire. At this juncture Bedford Borough requested more time to reflect on their position whilst maintaining close links and joint working where appropriate.
- CBC and Milton Keynes have produced an implementation plan with a view to others joining once the RAA has become established.
- The plan is to 'go live' in April 2019.

# Central East RAA – Agreed vision and design principals

## Vision

‘To achieve the best possible outcomes for children, and local areas - through high quality services that place children with the right adopters at the right time with the right support’

### Better life long outcomes for children and adopters

The experiences and life long outcomes of children and adopters will improve

Adoption will be an option for a wider range of children (including older children and those with complex needs)

More families will be able and willing to adopt

The RAA will recruit adopters in line with children’s needs

### A better environment and opportunities for the adoption workforce

RAA will retain and develop the right skills, experience and talent in support of high quality services

RAA will support and encourage professional and career development

## Design Principles

### Better value for money

Investment will be efficiently and effectively managed

Opportunities to reduce cost will be identified and acted on

Outcomes will be clearly defined and measured

Set up and implementation costs will be low

### Adoptions services will be transparent and collaborative

What RAA is and what it does will be clear and understandable

Local authorities will have influence over service delivery

There will be local presence of skilled adoption expertise

RAA will work collaboratively with local authorities and maintain regular and open communication

# Central East RAA – Implementation Plan

Preparation  
July 18 – Mar 19

- Appoint HoS
- Develop legal agreements
- Develop operational policies/procedures/processes
- Develop IT solution
- Develop branding/marketing and web site
- Run HR consultation and matching exercise

Launch  
April 19 – Sept 19

- Launch branded “RAA” with single front door/adopter recruitment/unified management/single budget incl. IAF
- Staff continue with existing caseload and transition to new roles in specialist teams

Fully Operation  
Oct 19 onwards

- Structure and processes fully operational
- IT system

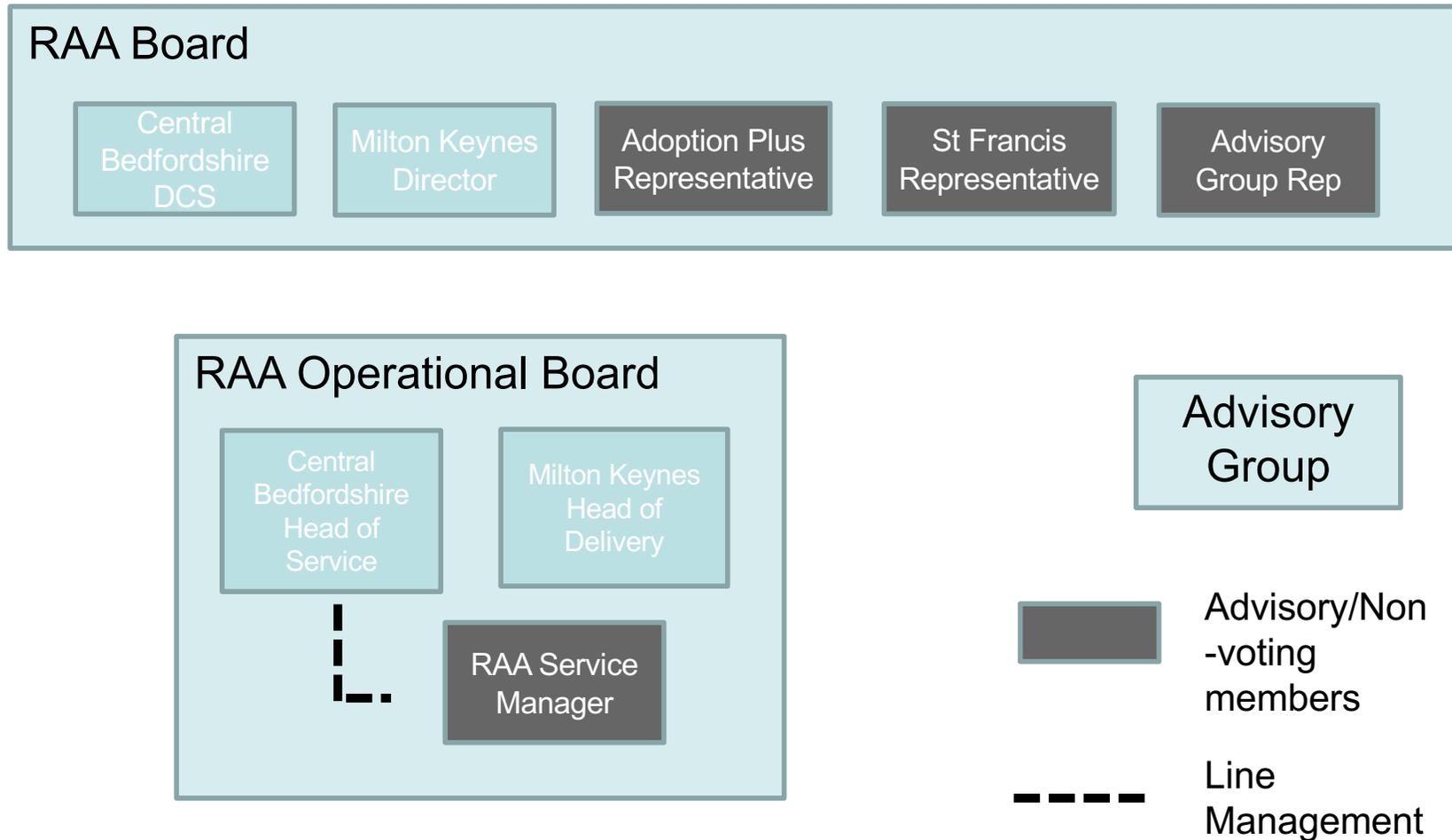
# June 2018 to March 2019

Six workstreams have been identified:

- Legal and governance
- Finance
- Operations
- Human resources
- IT and performance
- Marketing

Staff engagement in the process from both Milton Keynes and CBC has been very positive with front line staff and managers co-constructing the design for our RAA.

# RAA Governance Structure



# Benefits of working in a RAA

- CBC and Milton Keynes both have very strong adoption teams which would benefit by working together to develop greater specialisms and commission services on a wider scale
- CBC already hosts a joint adoption panel with Bedford Borough which works very well. Milton Keynes will join this arrangement.
- CBC's performance with adoption timescales is very good but there is always room for improvement and the less time children spend waiting for their 'forever' families is better for them
- Why CBC hosts?
- CBC's 2018 Ofsted report judged adoption and leadership in CS to be good.
- Meet statutory requirement to join an RAA by 2020 as set out in the Children and Families Act

# Mitigated Risks

- Costings in the full business case demonstrate that the RAA will be cost neutral giving better performance for the same financial investment
- The RAA will need to grow to develop sustainability going forward and we are in discussions with the DFE to progress this.

# TIMELINE

## CBC

29/08/2018	CMT
11/09/2018	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
25/10/2018	Corporate Parenting Panel
04/12/2018	Executive Board
Autumn 2018	Children's Leadership Board and LSCB for information
April 2019	<b>GO LIVE</b>

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**Central Bedfordshire Council**

**Corporate Parenting Panel**

25 October 2018

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**Work Programme**

Advising Officer:

Sharon Griffin, Committee Services Officer  
(Sharon.griffin@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

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**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**

<b>2018/19 Municipal Year</b>	
20 December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adoption Agency 6 month Interim report (NP)</li> <li>• Virtual School for LAC Interim Report for Academic Year 2017/18 (JE)</li> <li>• Fostering Q2 report (A.Craig)</li> <li>• Annual (Health) Report (NHS Bedfordshire CCG) (TM)</li> <li>• Spotlight report on Unaccompanied asylum seekers as LAC (AC)</li> </ul>
11 February 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘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)</li> <li>• Permanency Planning for Children including peer review feedback</li> <li>• Leaving care offer</li> <li>• Spotlight Report on LAC with disabilities (Ken Harvey)</li> <li>• Virtual School Interim Report for the Academic Year 2017-18 (JE)</li> <li>• Fostering Q3 report (A.Craig)</li> <li>• Work Programme (SG)</li> </ul>
8 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>

**Unscheduled reports:**

1. LAC Annual (Health) Report (NHS – Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group) (TMcD)
  - a. LAC 6 Month (Health) Report (NHS – Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group) (TMcD)
  - b. CAMHS and data available
  - c. East of England Protocol
  - d. Update on the Health Passport for Looked After Children and how the Passport works would be given
2. The appointment of a lay member/parent and the appointment of a substitute elected Member to the Joint Adoption Panel (author to be determined).
3. Progress report on the WAY project (May/June 2019)
4. The Chairman of the Fostering Panel Annual Report
5. LAC Annual Report

Appendix A

6. Adoption Support Fund

7. Fostering Service:

- Quarter 4 report