
Meeting: Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date: 6 September 2011
Subject: Annual Reports for the Adoption Service, Fostering Service and Private Fostering Provision
Report of: Cllr Mark Versallion, Executive Member for Children's Services
Summary: The report outlines the new statutory framework regarding annual reports and summarises key points contained within the reports.

Advising Officer: Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive/ Director of Children's Services
Contact Officer: Catherine Parry, Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

Central Bedfordshire Council's Strategic Plan 2009-11 Priority 2 – Educating, protecting and providing opportunities for children and young people.

The Children and Young People's Plan 2011-2014 Priority 2 – Protecting children and keeping them safe.

Adoption and fostering are key statutory services to Looked After Children.

Private fostering is a statutory child protection function ensuring that children living away from home in private arrangements are safe and in suitable placements.

Financial:

Adoption and fostering within Children's Services has an annual budget of £5.015 million, including income from Bedford Borough Council under the shared service arrangement. There are no new financial considerations arising from the annual reports.

Legal:

Regulations, associated statutory guidance and national minimum standards outlines the requirement to report to Members on the management and outcomes of the services, in order that they can satisfy themselves that the services are effective and achieving good outcomes for children.

Risk Management:

Regulatory risks: Failure to report would be a breach of national minimum standards.

Child protection risks: Failure to assess risk may lead to unfavourable outcomes.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

There are no staffing issues.

Equalities/Human Rights:

Adoption, fostering and private fostering affects all sectors of communities.

Community Safety:

There are no community safety issues.

Sustainability:

There are no sustainability issues.

RECOMMENDATION:

that the Committee comments on the statutory reports.

Background

1. The Children Act 2004, Care Standards Act 2000 and associated relevant regulations and national minimum standards require local authority adoption services, fostering services and private fostering provision to report regularly on the operation of the services. The service specific regulations outline the frequency of reporting and to whom the reports must be submitted.
2. The Adoption and Fostering Service is a shared service hosted by Central Bedfordshire Council. Annual reports contain information activity in respect of both Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Councils. This report will also be provided to Bedford Borough.

Adoption Service

3. The Adoption Service is required to report at six-monthly intervals. In Central Bedfordshire Council, this will be to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee. An annual report will be presented by the end of June each year covering the preceding April to March period. In addition a six-monthly briefing update will be produced by the end of October each year and presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel. As these new regulations have just been made the sequence is late this year.
4. In 2010–11 there was a significant increase in the number of children whose cases were presented to the Adoption Panel for a recommendation as to whether adoption should be the plan for the child. This was for 27 children, an increase of 14 over the previous 12 months. 11 households were approved as adopters and matches of children to adopters were made.
5. Five Adoption Orders were granted in respect of looked after children in Central Bedfordshire Council, with a further two being granted Special Guardianship.
6. As of 31 March 2011, 41 adopted children and their families who were in receipt of support. This is no change to the average number of cases in the previous year. In addition contact plans were being made on behalf of 204 children. Each child placed for adoption is required to have a contact plan in relation to their birth family, which usually involves supporting the periodic exchange of letters or information between adoptive and birth families.
7. There were 80 referrals from adult adoptees and their birth relatives. Post adoption support in the form of tracing birth records, counselling and practical advice during tracing, an intermediary service and pre and post reunion support was provided.

Fostering Service

8. A report to Members is required at three monthly intervals. This will be achieved by production of an annual report to this Committee by the end of June each year covering the April to March period. In addition, three-monthly updates will be presented at the end of July, October and January each year to the Corporate Parenting Panel.
9. 27 new fostering households were approved during 2010-11. At 31 March 2011 there were a total of 121 fostering households offering various types of foster placements. These included long term/permanent placements, short term or emergency provision, specialist Youth Care placements for young people aged 10 years and over with complex needs, respite placements and Family Link placements offering short breaks to children with disabilities.

10. 121 children were placed in full-time foster placements at the end of March 2011, of whom 59 were looked after by Central Bedfordshire Council. Across both Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council, there have been 159 referrals for placements; 74 with carers approved by Central Bedfordshire Council, 35 placed in independent fostering agencies, eight placed in residential units and the remainder who did not become looked after by either Council.
11. The number of enquiries from members of the public interested in becoming foster carers rose from 221 in 2009-10 to 260 in 2010-11. All enquiries received prompt information and a visit from a social worker. From these enquires 45 households made formal application to become a foster carer.
12. Over the course of the year 118 training activities were provided for foster carers on 46 topics. 570 delegates attended. A range of support was provided to foster carers, including regular supervision from a social worker, support groups, peer mentoring and out-of-hours telephone support.

Private Fostering Provision

13. An annual report in respect of private fostering is required by regulation to be provided to the Director of Children's Services and the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB). As these reports are produced six monthly, the report to cover April to September 2011 is scheduled to be presented to the LSCB Strategic Boards for both Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Councils in October 2011. When agreed, the annual report will also be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for information.
14. The Council has a duty to publicise the requirement for it to be notified of any private fostering arrangements in its area. Notifications have to be responded to within seven working days by way of a visit to the household and the start of an assessment as to the suitability of the arrangement. The child and family are then visited at least six-weekly for the duration of the arrangement.
15. There were 10 new notifications in Central Bedfordshire Council area during April 2010 to March 2011. Nine were visited within seven working days. There were legitimate reasons why the final visit did not meet target. Four private fostering arrangements were ongoing at 31 March 2011. Most children were over 10 years of age and were of white British origin.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Adoption Agency Annual Report
Appendix B – Fostering Agency Annual Report
Appendix C – Private Fostering Annual Report

Location of papers:

Priory House, Chicksands